THE Public Interest

NUMBER 81, FALL 1985, PRICE: $4.00

TWENTY YEARS AFTER 1965–1985

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TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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CONTENTS

The Rediscovery of Character: Private Virtue and Public Policy	*James Q. Wilson*	3
Interests and Passions	*Nathan Glazer*	17
Skepticism, Meliorism, and *The Public Interest*	*Irving Kristol*	31
The Revolt Against Modernity	*Daniel Bell*	42
What Is the Civic Interest?	*Mark Lilla*	64
Twenty Years of Housing Programs	*Roger Starr*	82
The Social Security Explosion	*Martin Feldstein*	94
The Paranoid Style in American Politics Revisited	*Daniel P. Moynihan*	107
The Conservative Renaissance in Perspective	*Robert Nisbet*	128
Contributors		142

THE PUBLIC INTEREST (ISSN-0033-3557) is published quarterly by National Affairs, Inc. and appears in Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter issues. Its office of publication is located at 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022. Subscription price: $16.00 for one year; $32.00 for two years. Add $2.00 annually for Canadian and foreign subscriptions. Unsolicited material cannot be returned unless accompanied by sufficient return postage. Second class postage is paid at New York, and at additional mailing offices. © 1985 by National Affairs, Inc. Postmaster: Please send all changes of address to: Public Interest Subscription Dept., 20th and Northampton Streets, Easton, PA 18042.

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Easton, PA 18042

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Bernhard DeBoer, Inc.
113 E. Centre St., Nutley, NJ 07110

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The rediscovery of character: private virtue and public policy

JAMES Q. WILSON

THE most important change in how one defines the public interest that I have witnessed—and experienced—over the last twenty years has been a deepening concern for the development of character in the citizenry. An obvious indication of this shift has been the rise of such social issues as abortion and school prayer. A less obvious but I think more important change has been the growing awareness that a variety of public problems can only be understood—and perhaps addressed—if they are seen as arising out of a defect in character formation.

The Public Interest began publication at about the time that economics was becoming the preferred mode of policy analysis. Its very first issue contained an article by Daniel Patrick Moynihan hailing the triumph of macroeconomics: "Men are learning how to make an industrial economy work" as evidenced by the impressive ability of economists not only to predict economic events accurately but to control them by, for example, delivering on the promise of full employment. Six months later I published an essay suggesting that poverty be dealt with by direct income transfers in the form of a negative income tax or family allowances. In the next issue, James Tobin made a full-scale proposal for a negative income tax and Virginia Held welcomed program planning and budgeting to Washington

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as a means for rationalizing the allocative decisions of government, a topic enlarged upon the following year by a leading practitioner of applied economics, William Gorham. Meanwhile, Thomas C. Schelling had published a brilliant economic analysis of organized crime and Christopher Jencks a call for a voucher system that would allow parents to choose among public and private purveyors of education. In a later issue, Gordon Tullock explained the rise in crime as a consequence of individuals responding rationally to an increase in the net benefit of criminality.

There were criticisms of some of these views. Alvin L. Schorr, James C. Vadakian, and Nathan Glazer published essays in 1966, 1968, and 1969 attacking aspects of the negative income tax, and Aaron Wildavsky expressed his skepticism about program budgeting. But the criticisms themselves often accepted the economic assumptions of those being criticized. Schorr, for example, argued that the negative income tax was unworkable because it did not resolve the conflict between having a strong work incentive (and thus too small a payment to many needy individuals) and providing an adequate payment to the needy (and thus weakening the work incentive and making the total cost politically unacceptable). Schorr proposed instead a system of children's allowances and improved social security coverage, but he did not dissent from the view that the only thing wrong with poor people was that they did not have enough money and the conviction that they had a "right" to enough. Tobin was quick to point out that he and Schorr were on the same side, differing only in minor details.

A central assumption of economics is that "tastes" (which include what non-economists would call values and beliefs, as well as interests) can be taken as given and are not problematic. All that is interesting in human behavior is how it changes in response to changes in the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action. All that is necessary in public policy is to arrange the incentives confronting voters, citizens, firms, bureaucrats, and politicians so that they will behave in a socially optimal way. An optimal policy involves an efficient allocation—one that purchases the greatest amount of some good for a given cost, or minimizes the cost of a given amount of some good.

This view so accords with common sense in countless aspects of ordinary life that, for many purposes, its value is beyond dispute. Moreover, enough political decisions are manifestly so inefficient or rely so excessively on issuing commands (instead of arranging incentives) that very little harm and much good can be done by urging

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public officials to "think economically" about public policy. But over the last two decades, this nation has come face to face with problems that do not seem to respond, or respond enough, to changes in incentives. They do not respond, it seems, because the people whose behavior we wish to change do not have the right "tastes" or discount the future too heavily. To put it plainly, they lack character. Consider four areas of public policy: schooling, welfare, public finance, and crime.

Schooling

Nothing better illustrates the changes in how we think about policy than the problem of finding ways to improve educational attainment and student conduct in the schools. One of the first reports of the 1966 study on education by James Coleman and his associates appeared in this magazine. As every expert on schooling knows, that massive survey of public schools found that differences in the objective inputs to such schools—pupil-teacher ratios, the number of books in the library, per pupil expenditures, the age and quality of buildings—had no independent effect on student achievement as measured by standardized tests of verbal ability.

But as many scholars have forgotten, the Coleman Report also found that educational achievement was profoundly affected by the family background and peer-group environment of the pupil. And those who did notice this finding understandably despaired of devising a program that would improve the child's family background or social environment. Soon, many specialists had concluded that schools could make no difference in a child's life prospects, and so the burden of enhancing those prospects would have to fall on other measures. (To Christopher Jencks, the inability of the schools to reduce social inequality was an argument for socialism.)

Parents, of course, acted as if the Coleman Report had never been written. They sought, often at great expense, communities that had good schools, never doubting for a moment that they could tell the difference between good ones and bad ones or that this difference in school quality would make a difference in their child's education. The search for good schools in the face of evidence that there was no objective basis for that search seemed paradoxical, even irrational.

In 1979, however, Michael Rutter and his colleagues in England published a study that provided support for parental understanding by building on the neglected insights of the Coleman Report. In *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, the Rutter group reported what they learned

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from following a large number of children from a working-class section of inner London as they moved through a dozen non-selective schools in their community. Like Coleman before him, Rutter found that the objective features of the schools made little difference; like almost every other scholar, he found that differences in verbal intelligence at age ten were the best single predictor of educational attainment in the high school years. But unlike Coleman, he looked at differences in that attainment across schools, holding individual ability constant. Rutter found that the schools in inner London had very different effects on their pupils, not only in educational achievement but also in attendance, classroom behavior, and even delinquency. Some schools did a better job than others in teaching children and managing their behavior.

The more effective schools had two distinctive characteristics. First, they had a more balanced mix of children—that is, they contained a substantial number of children of at least average intellectual ability. By contrast, schools that were less effective had a disproportionate number of low-ability students. If you are a pupil of below average ability, you do better, both academically and behaviorally, if you attend a school with a large number of students who are somewhat abler than you. The intellectual abilities of the students, it turned out, were far more important than their ethnic or class characteristics in producing this desirable balance.

Second, the more effective schools had a distinctive ethos: an emphasis on academic achievement, the regular assignment of homework, the consistent and fair use of rewards (especially praise) to enforce generally agreed-upon standards of conduct, and energetic teacher involvement in directing classroom work. Subsequent research by others has generally confirmed the Rutter account, so much so that educational specialists are increasingly discussing what has come to be known as the "effective schools" model.

What is striking about the desirable school ethos is that it so obviously resembles what almost every developmental psychologist describes as the desirable family ethos. Parents who are warm and caring but who also use discipline in a fair and consistent manner are those parents who, other things being equal, are least likely to produce delinquent offspring. A decent family is one that instills a decent character in its children; a good school is one that takes up and continues in a constructive manner this development of character.

Teaching students with the right mix of abilities and in an atmosphere based on the appropriate classroom ethos may be easier in private than in public schools, a fact which helps explain why Cole-

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man (joined now by Thomas Hoffer and Sally Kilgore) was able to suggest in the 1982 book, *High School Achievement*, that private and parochial high schools may do somewhat better than public ones in improving the vocabulary and mathematical skills of students and that this private-school advantage may be largely the result of the better behavior of children in those classrooms. In the authors' words, "achievement and discipline are intimately intertwined." Public schools that combine academic demands and high disciplinary standards produce greater educational achievement than public schools that do not. As it turns out, private and parochial schools are better able to sustain these desirable habits of work behavior —this greater display of good character—than are public ones.

Welfare

Besides the Coleman Report, another famous document appeared at about the time this magazine was launched—the Moynihan Report on the problems of the black family (officially, the U.S. Department of Labor document entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*). The storm of controversy that report elicited is well-known. Despite Moynihan's efforts to keep the issue alive by publishing in these pages several essays on the welfare problem in America, the entire subject of single-parent families in particular and black families in general became an occasion for the exchange of mutual recriminations instead of a topic of scientific inquiry and policy entrepreneurship. Serious scholarly work, if it existed at all, was driven underground, and policymakers were at pains to avoid the matter except, occasionally, under the guise of "welfare reform" which meant (if you were a liberal) raising the level of benefits or (if you were a conservative) cutting them. By the end of the 1960s, almost everybody in Washington had in this sense become a conservative; welfare reform, as Moynihan remarked, was dead.

Twenty years after the Moynihan Report, Moynihan himself could deliver at Harvard a lecture in which he repeated the observations he had made in 1965, but this time to an enthusiastic audience and widespread praise in the liberal media. At the same time, Glenn C. Loury, a black economist, could publish in these pages an essay in which he observed that almost everything Moynihan had said in 1965 had proved true except in one sense—today, single-parent families are twice as common as they were when Moynihan first called the matter to public attention. The very title of Loury's essay suggested how times had changed: Whereas leaders once spoke of "welfare reform" as if it were a problem of finding the

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most cost-effective way to distribute aid to needy families, Loury was now prepared to speak of it as "The Moral Quandary of the Black Community."

Two decades that could have been devoted to thought and experimentation had been frittered away. We are no closer today than we were in 1965 to understanding why black children are usually raised by one parent rather than by two or exactly what consequences, beyond the obvious fact that such families are very likely to be poor, follows from this pattern of family life. To the extent the matter was addressed at all, it was usually done by assuming that welfare payments provided an incentive for families to dissolve. To deal with this, some people embraced the negative income tax (or as President Nixon rechristened it, the Family Assistance Plan) because it would provide benefits to all poor families, broken or not, and thus remove incentive for dissolution.

There were good reasons to be somewhat skeptical of that view. If the system of payments under the program for Aid to Families of Dependent Children (AFDC) was to blame for the rise in single-parent families, why did the rise occur so dramatically among blacks but not to nearly the same extent among whites? If AFDC provided an incentive for men to beget children without assuming responsibility for supporting them, why was the illegitimacy rate rising even in states that did not require the father to be absent from the home for the family to obtain assistance? If AFDC created so perverse a set of incentives, why did these incentives have so large an effect in the 1960s and 1970s (when single-parent families were increasing by leaps and bounds) and so little, if any, such effect in the 1940s and 1950s (when such families scarcely increased at all)? And if AFDC were the culprit, how is it that poor, single-parent families rose in number during a decade (the 1970s) when the value of AFDC benefits in real dollars was declining?

Behavior does change with changes in incentives. The results of the negative income tax experiments certainly show that. In the Seattle and Denver experiments, the rate of family dissolution was much higher among families who received the guaranteed annual income than among similar families who did not—36 percent higher in the case of whites, 42 percent higher in the case of blacks. Men getting the cash benefits reduced their hours of work by 9 percent, women by 20 percent, and young males without families by 43 percent.

Charles Murray, whose 1984 book, *Losing Ground*, has done so much to focus attention on the problem of welfare, generally en-

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dorses the economic explanation for the decline of two-parent families. The evidence from the negative income tax experiments is certainly consistent with his view, and he makes a good case that the liberalization of welfare eligibility rules in the 1960s contributed to the sudden increase in the AFDC caseload. But as he is the first to admit, the data do not exist to offer a fully tested explanation of the rise of single-parent families; the best he can do is to offer a mental experiment showing how young, poor men and women might rationally respond to the alternative benefits of work for a two-parent family and welfare payments for a one-parent one. He rejects the notion that character, the *Zeitgeist*, or cultural differences are necessary to an explanation. But he cannot show that young, poor men and women in fact responded to AFDC as he assumes they did, nor can he explain the racial differences in rates or the rise in caseloads at a time of declining benefits. He notes an alternative explanation that cannot be ruled out: During the 1960s, a large number of persons who once thought of being on welfare as a temporary and rather embarrassing expedient came to regard it as a right that they would not be deterred from exercising. The result of that change can be measured: Whereas in 1967, 63 percent of the persons eligible for AFDC were on the rolls, by 1970 91 percent were.

In short, the character of a significant number of persons changed. To the extent one thinks that change was fundamentally wrong, then, as Loury has put it, the change creates a moral problem. What does one do about such a moral problem? Lawrence Mead has suggested invigorating the work requirement associated with welfare, so that anyone exercising a "right" to welfare will come to understand that there is a corresponding obligation. Murray has proposed altering the incentives by increasing the difficulty of getting welfare or the shame of having it or so as to provide positive rewards for not having children, at least out of wedlock. But nobody has yet come to grips with how one might test a way of using either obligations or incentives to alter character so that people who once thought it good to sire or bear illegitimate children will now think it wrong.

Public finance

We have a vast and rising governmental deficit. Amidst the debate about how one might best reduce that deficit (or more typically, reduce the rate of increase in it), scarcely anyone asks why we have not always had huge deficits.

If you believe that voters and politicians seek rationally to maxi-

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mize their self-interest, then it would certainly be in the interest of most people to transfer wealth from future generations to present ones. If you want the federal government to provide you with some benefit and you cannot persuade other voters to pay for your benefit with higher taxes, then you should be willing to have the government borrow to pay for that benefit. Since every voter has something he would like from the government, each has an incentive to obtain that benefit with funds to be repaid by future generations. There are, of course, some constraints on unlimited debt financing. Accumulated debt charges from past generations must be financed by this generation, and if these charges are heavy there may well develop some apprehension about adding to them. If some units of government default on their loans, there are immediate economic consequences. But these constraints are not strong enough to inhibit more than marginally the rational desire to let one's grandchildren pay (in inflation-devalued dollars) the cost of present indulgences.

That being so, why is it that large deficits, except in wartime, have been a feature of public finance only in the past few decades? What kept voters and politicians from buying on credit heavily and continuously beginning with the first days of the republic?

James M. Buchanan, in his 1984 presidential address to the Western Economic Association, has offered one explanation for this paradox. He has suggested that public finance was once subject to a moral constraint—namely, that it was right to pay as you go and accumulate capital and wrong to borrow heavily and squander capital. Max Weber, of course, had earlier argued that essential to the rise of capitalism was a widely shared belief (he ascribed it to Protestantism) in the moral propriety of deferring present consumption for future benefits. Buchanan has recast this somewhat: He argues that a Victorian morality inhibited Anglo-American democracies from giving in to their selfish desire to beggar their children.

Viewed in this way, John Maynard Keynes was not simply an important economist, he was a moral revolutionary. He subjected to rational analysis the conventional restraints on deficit financing, not in order to show that debt was always good but to prove that it was not necessarily bad. Deficit financing should be judged, he argued, by its practical effect, not by its moral quality.

Buchanan is a free-market economist, and thus a member of a group not ordinarily given to explaining behavior in any terms other than the pursuit of self-interest narrowly defined. This fact makes all the more significant his argument that economic analysts must understand "how morals impact on choice, and especially how an

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erosion of moral precepts can modify the established functioning of economic and political institutions."

A rejoinder can be made to the Buchanan explanation of deficit financing. Much of the accumulated debt is a legacy of having fought wars, a legacy that can be justified on both rational and moral grounds (who wishes to lose a war, or to leave for one's children a Europe dominated by Hitler?). Another part of the debt exists because leaders miscalculated the true costs of desirable programs. According to projections made in 1965, Medicare was supposed to cost less than $9 billion a year in 1990; in 1985, the bill was already running in excess of $70 billion a year. Military pensions seemed the right thing to do when men were being called to service; only in retrospect is their total cost appreciated. The Reagan tax cuts were not designed to impose heavy debts on our children but to stimulate investment and economic growth; only later did it become obvious that they have contributed far more to the deficit than to economic growth. The various subsidies given to special interest groups for long seemed like a small price to pay for insuring the support of a heterogeneous people for a distant government; no one could have forseen their cumulative burden.

No doubt there is some truth in the proposition that our current level of debt is the result of miscalculation and good intentions gone awry. But what strengthens Buchanan's argument, I believe, is the direction of these miscalculations (if that is what they were) and the nature of these good intentions. In almost every instance, leaders proposing a new policy erred in the direction of understating rather than overstating future costs; in almost every instance, evidence of a good intention was taken to be government action rather than inaction. Whether one wishes to call it a shift in moral values or not, one must be struck by the systematic and consistent bias in how we debated public programs beginning in the 1930s but especially in the 1960s. It is hard to remember it now, but there once was a time, lasting from 1789 to well into the 1950s, when the debate over almost any new proposal was about whether it was *legitimate* for the government to do this at all. These were certainly the terms in which Social Security, civil rights, Medicare, and government regulation of business were first addressed. By the 1960s, the debate was much different: how much should we spend (not, should we spend anything at all); how can a policy be made cost-effective (not, should we have such a policy in the first place). The character of public discourse changed and I suspect in ways that suggest a change in the nature of public character.

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Crime

I have written more about crime than any other policy issue, and so my remarks on our changing understanding of this problem are to a large degree remarks about changes in my own way of thinking about it. On no subject have the methods of economics and policy analysis had greater or more salutary effect than on scholarly discussions of criminal justice. For purposes of designing public policies, it has proved useful to think of would-be offenders as mostly young males who compare the net benefits of crime with those of work and leisure. Such thinking, and the rather considerable body of evidence that supports it, leads us to expect that changes in the net benefits of crime affect the level of crime in society. To the extent that policymakers and criminologists have become less hostile to the idea of altering behavior by altering its consequences, progress has been made. Even if the amount by which crime is reduced by these measures is modest (as I think in a free society it will be), the pursuit of these policies conforms more fully than does the rehabilitative idea to our concept of justice—namely, that each person should receive his due.

But long-term changes in crime rates exceed anything that can be explained by either rational calculation or the varying proportion of young males in the population. Very little in either contemporary economics or conventional criminology equips us to understand the decline in reported crime rates during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth despite rapid industrialization and urbanization, a large influx of poor immigrants, the growing ethnic heterogeneity of society, and widening class cleavages. Very little in the customary language of policy analysis helps us explain why Japan should have such abnormally low crime rates despite high population densities, a history that glorifies samurai violence, a rather permissive pattern of child-rearing, the absence of deep religious convictions, and the remarkably low ratio of police officers to citizens.

In an essay in this magazine in 1983 I attempted to explain the counterintuitive decline in crime during the period after the Civil War in much the same terms that David H. Bayley had used in a 1976 article dealing with crime in Japan. In both cases, distinctive cultural forces helped restrain individual self-expression. In Japan, these forces subject an individual to the informal social controls of family and neighbors by making him extremely sensitive to the good opinion of others. The controls are of long standing and have so far remained largely intact despite the individualizing tendencies of

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modernization. In the United States, by contrast, these cultural forces have operated only in certain periods, and when they were effective it was as a result of a herculean effort by scores of voluntary associations specially created for the purpose.

In this country as well as in England, a variety of enterprises —Sunday schools, public schools, temperance movements, religious revivals, YMCAs, the Children's Aid Society—were launched in the first half of the nineteenth century that had in common the goal of instilling a "self-activating, self-regulating, all-purpose inner control." The objects of these efforts were those young men who, freed from the restraints of family life on the farms, had moved to the boardinghouses of the cities in search of economic opportunities. We lack any reliable measure of the effect of these efforts, save one —the extraordinary reduction in the per capita consumption of alcoholic beverages that occurred between 1830 (when the temperance efforts began in earnest) and 1850 and that persisted (despite an upturn during and just after the Civil War) for the rest of the century.

We now refer to this period as one in which "Victorian morality" took hold; the term itself, at least as now employed, reflects the condescension in which that ethos has come to be regarded. Modernity, as I have argued elsewhere, involves, at least in elite opinion, replacing the ethic of self-control with that of self-expression. Some great benefits have flowed from this change, including the liberation of youthful energies to pursue new ideas in art, music, literature, politics, and economic enterprise. But the costs are just as real, at least for those young persons who have not already acquired a decent degree of self-restraint and other-regardingness.

The view that crime has social and cultural as well as economic causes is scarcely new. Hardly any lay person, and only a few scholars, would deny that family and neighborhood affect individual differences in criminality. But what of it? How, as I asked in 1974, might a government remake bad families into good ones, especially if it must be done on a large scale? How might the government of a free society reshape the core values of its people and still leave them free?

They were good questions then and they remain good ones today. In 1974 there was virtually no reliable evidence that any program seeking to prevent crime by changing attitudes and values had succeeded for any large number of persons. In 1974 I could only urge policymakers to postpone the effort to eliminate the root causes of crime in favor of using those available policy instruments—target hardening, job training, police deployment, court sentences—that

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might have a marginal effect at a reasonable cost on the commission of crime. Given what we knew then and know now, acting as if crime is the result of individuals freely choosing among competing alternatives may be the best we can do.

In retrospect, nothing I have written about crime so dismayed some criminologists as this preference for doing what is possible rather than attempting what one wishes were possible. My purpose was to substitute the experimental method for personal ideology; this effort has led some people to suspect I was really trying to substitute my ideology for theirs. Though we all have beliefs that color our views, I would hope that everybody would try to keep that coloration under control by constant reference to the test of practical effect. What works?

With time and experience we have learned a bit more about what works. There are now some glimmers of hope that certain experimental projects aimed at preparing children for school and equipping parents to cope with unruly offspring may reduce the rate at which these youngsters later commit delinquent acts. Richard J. Herrnstein and I have written about these and related matters in *Crime and Human Nature*. Whether further tests and repeated experiments will confirm that these glimmers emanate from the mother lode of truth and not from fool's gold, no one can yet say. But we know how to find out. If we discover that these ideas can be made to work on a large scale (and not just in the hands of a few gifted practitioners), then we will be able to reduce crime by, in effect, improving character.

Character and policy

The traditional understanding of politics was that its goal was to improve the character of its citizens. The American republic was, as we know, founded on a very different understanding—that of taking human nature pretty much as it was and hoping that personal liberty could survive political action if ambition were made to counteract ambition. The distinctive nature of the American system has led many of its supporters (to say nothing of its critics) to argue that it should be indifferent to character formation. Friend and foe alike are fond of applying to government Samuel Goldwyn's response to the person who asked what message was to be found in his films: If you want to send a message, use Western Union.

Since I yield to no one in my admiration for what the Founders created, I do not wish to argue the fundamental proposition. But the federal government today is very different from what it was

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in 1787, 1887, or even 1957. If we wish it to address the problems of family disruption, welfare dependency, crime in the streets, educational inadequacy, or even public finance properly understood, then government, by the mere fact that it defines these states of affairs as problems, acknowledges that human character is, in some degree, defective and that it intends to alter it. The local governments of village and township always understood this, of course, because they always had responsibility for shaping character. The public school movement, for example, was from the beginning chiefly aimed at moral instruction. The national government could afford to manage its affairs by letting ambition counteract ambition because what was originally at stake in national affairs—creating and maintaining a reasonably secure commercial regime—lent itself naturally to the minimal attentions of a limited government operated and restrained by the reciprocal force of mutual self-interest.

It is easier to acknowledge the necessary involvement of government in character formation than it is to prescribe how this responsibility should be carried out. The essential first step is to acknowledge that at root, in almost every area of important public concern, we are seeking to induce persons to act virtuously, whether as schoolchildren, applicants for public assistance, would-be lawbreakers, or voters and public officials. Not only is such conduct desirable in its own right, it appears now to be necessary if large improvements are to be made in those matters we consider problems: schooling, welfare, crime, and public finance.

By virtue, I mean habits of moderate action; more specifically, acting with due restraint on one's impulses, due regard for the rights of others, and reasonable concern for distant consequences. Scarcely anyone favors bad character or a lack of virtue, but it is all too easy to deride a policy of improving character by assuming that this implies a nation of moralizers delivering banal homilies to one another.

Virtue is not learned by precept, however; it is learned by the regular repetition of right actions. We are induced to do the right thing with respect to small matters, and in time we persist in doing the right thing because now we have come to take pleasure in it. By acting rightly with respect to small things, we are more likely to act rightly with respect to large ones. If this view sounds familiar, it should; it is Aristotle's. Let me now quote him directly: "We become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control."

Seen in this way, there is no conflict between economic thought and moral philosophy: The latter simply supplies a fuller statement

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of the uses to which the former can and should be put. We want our families and schools to induce habits of right conduct; most parents and teachers do this by arranging the incentives confronting youngsters in the ordinary aspects of their daily lives so that right action routinely occurs.

What economics neglects is the important subjective consequence of acting in accord with a proper array of incentives: people come to feel pleasure in right action and guilt in wrong action. These feelings of pleasure and pain are not mere "tastes" that policy analysts should take as given; they are the central constraints on human avarice and sloth, the very core of a decent character. A course of action cannot be evaluated simply in terms of its cost-effectiveness, because the consequence of following a given course—if it is followed often enough and regularly enough—is to teach those who follow it what society thinks is right and wrong.

Conscience and character, naturally, are not enough. Rules and rewards must still be employed; indeed, given the irresistible appeal of certain courses of action—such as impoverishing future generations for the benefit of the present one—only some rather draconian rules may suffice. But for most social problems that deeply trouble us, the need is to explore, carefully and experimentally, ways of strengthening the formation of character among the very young. In the long run, the public interest depends on private virtue.

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Interests and passions

NATHAN GLAZER

THE *PUBLIC INTEREST* was launched under the sign of the interests; it now operates in an environment in which the passions are dominant. By "interests" I mean of course "economic interests."[1] One must add, to define further the attitude of the founders of *The Public Interest*, that they did not think that in advanced industrial societies, such as the United States or Western Europe, interests caused any necessary and fatal division among social classes: All could agree on courses of action that satisfied more or less the interests of workers and employers, property owners and tenants, farmers and consumers, rentiers and investors. Thus, whatever fine distinctions the editors and founders may have made over the "end of ideology" thesis, they believed that there was no sound basis for Marxist ideology, or other ideologies that posited the incapacity of capitalist society to provide stability, growth, and a decent life to the various classes that made it up.

[1] My title is very close to Albert Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), which traces the use of the terms "passions" and "interests" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and shows how what was once considered a leading passion—for money—became divorced from "the passions," to be considered an "interest." The passions then became reserved for non-economic desires or motives. I use these terms with the meanings they have acquired, as Hirschman demonstrates, over the last two centuries.

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It was fortunate perhaps that *The Public Interest* began publication after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It was thus not necessary to deal at length with the one greatest source of passion in the United States, the race question, for it seemed a consensus had been forged as to that: The American dilemma was officially declared overcome, and any discrimination against blacks or other races, the Congress agreed, joining the executive and the judiciary branches, would no longer be allowed. It was perhaps even more fortunate in justifying *The Public Interest*'s approach to public policy that it was launched in the wake of Lyndon Johnson's enormous victory over Barry Goldwater, the last Republican candidate for President to campaign against the welfare state. (Whatever hyperbole may assert, Ronald Reagan did not: In his campaign rhetoric, the Social Security system was sacrosanct and the "safety net" would be maintained.) Barry Goldwater, it may be recalled, also campaigned against the extension of Federal power to secure civil rights: As a result, he became the first Republican candidate to win the states of the Deep South, but he lost just about everything else.

It would be safe to assume (no poll was taken) that everyone associated with *The Public Interest* supported Lyndon Johnson, opposed Barry Goldwater, and expected that the public business of the future (leaving aside foreign policy, which was meticulously excluded from the journal's sphere of interest) would be dealt with in a rational, pragmatic, analytical, even scientific spirit. It was indeed because of such expectations that it was considered propitious to launch such a journal as *The Public Interest*. The nation had unfinished business in catching up to the advanced welfare states in Europe. Our arrangements for health insurance were still inadequate. Policies devised in the 1930s and 1940s and 1950s needed overhaul: There were problems with welfare, with public housing, with urban renewal. A principled opposition to governmental involvement in these areas did not need to be discussed: It was clearly "ideological," just as Marxist insistence on the necessary conflict between the social classes was ideological. Rather, the proper scope of argument over arrangements in these areas was, properly, technical, and among these, policies that made use of economic incentives to achieve publicly beneficial action by employers, workers, property owners, renters, physicians and hospitals and sick patients, had high favor. But this was not considered ideological; this was practical, in avoiding costs and heightening efficiency.

Indeed, observing the rash of social legislation that was being devised in Washington in 1962-1963 (scarcely the flood that ensued

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under Presidents Johnson and Nixon, but sufficient), I noted in an article in *New Society* in 1963 that social reform now proceeded under the aegis of professionals from the social services, universities, research organizations. One could not find a mass demand for the changes in mental health arrangements, treatment of juvenile delinquency, shifts in public housing policy, and a variety of other areas that were under consideration or being implemented: Rather, experts explored the ragged pattern of American social policy to find the holes, and proposed what was necessary to plug them, ignoring Marxists on the left and old-time opponents of the welfare state on the right. No major theory criticizing the welfare state or the capacities of the government to arrange matters for the better had any substantial credence.

The business of the day was thus the completion of the welfare state, for which Christian Democratic or Social Democratic Europe provided a guide. Note that one could then say, indifferently, if one thought about social policy, Christian Democratic *or* Social Democratic Europe: It seemed, from the viewpoint of the United States, hardly to matter whether the moderate left or right was in power in the advanced European nations—they followed more or less the same policies. What better example of "the end of ideology," the reign of professionalism?

Republican resurgence and the "social issue"

In the debate between the passions and the interests, *The Public Interest* was definitely on the side of the interests. But it seems consensus arrives just in time to be overthrown. Issues were already agitating the public that did not involve interests—economic interests, that is. They involved deeply held beliefs—prejudices, if you will—about how society should be arranged. Daniel Bell and others have warned of the danger of such issues. They have pointed out that where economic interests are involved, one can cut the difference. Where passions are involved one cannot. Had we been perceptive enough to notice, the Johnson-Goldwater election would have alerted us that old passions had not been stilled, and new passions were rising, passions not attached to interests but to world view, moral outlook, deeply held values. These were to govern American politics and the possibilities of social policy increasingly in the 1970s, and have become dominant in the 1980s.

For the Goldwater vote not only signalled the end of the saliency of some old issues: It also indicated the emergence of some new issues, as Kevin Phillips was to point out in his very perceptive book, *The*

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Emerging Republican Majority, in 1969. Just as in Al Smith's overwhelming defeat in 1928 one could detect a new pattern of voting that foreshadowed Roosevelt's dominance, as Sam Lubell had pointed out in 1952, so one could detect some new patterns in Republican voting that were to lead to victory for Nixon in 1968, and a Republican presidential dominance that was broken only by the post-Watergate election of Carter.

Almost everyone considered the Goldwater campaign a matter of the finished business of the past, demonstrating nothing more clearly than that extreme views would simply lose the center that every presidential candidate needed. But Kevin Phillips, looking back from the perspective of Nixon's victory in 1968, saw key signs of a new Republican resurgence in 1964—and one not arguing at all for a move back to the center. Phillips noted that Goldwater had done better than Nixon had in 1960 among the Northeast ethnic groups that had been the necessary pillar of Democratic dominance: "Irish, German, and Italian Catholic precincts in the New York area often gave Barry Goldwater a higher vote share than they had given Richard Nixon. Some normally Democratic Irish election districts actually gave Goldwater a majority of their vote. On a statewide basis, Goldwater ran considerably behind the 1960 GOP presidential showing in the Northeastern states, but the contrast between different voting streams was enormous. Negro precincts where Landon had won a third of the vote went fifty-to-one Democratic; small Yankee towns which had been three-to-one Republican in 1936 went two-to-one Democratic; . . . Catholic urban precincts which had been four-to-one for Roosevelt gave Barry Goldwater a narrow edge."

And the stirring in the ashes of the Goldwater defeat was discernible not only in the Northeast, in which Goldwater had lost disastrously: "Just as the outlines of a new Democratic Party were discernible in the rubble of Al Smith's 1928 defeat, the 1964 election returns in the Great Lakes suggested a changing GOP. A lesser percentage of the party presidential vote was being drawn from long-time Yankee and silk-stocking bailiwicks, and Ohio Valley German and urban lower-middle-class votes were assuming steadily increased importance. The best two Goldwater states of 1964 were those —Illinois and Indiana—thrusting furthest South."

The dynamics of the shift to the Democrats under Smith and Roosevelt were clear: Workingmen were voting their interests as they saw them, abandoning third-party socialist and progressive illusions on the one hand, and attachments which had been forged

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as far back as 1896 to the Republican Party as the party of industrial prosperity on the other. What were the dynamics of the new shift of 1964 and 1968? Phillips spends remarkably few words on this. For him it is basic passions and basic hostilities grounded in ethnicity, religion, race, that form political allegiances. They are taken for granted, and need hardly be discussed. If Irish Catholics become Democrats, the Anglo-Saxon Protestants in opposition will be confirmed in their Republicanism (or vice versa). If blacks swing heavily to the Democrats, hostile white ethnics will swing to the Republicans. And so on. The patterns are remarkably long-lasting, and it takes a convulsion to upset them. One major convulsion was the Civil War and its aftermath, which anchored the white South to the Democrats, Yankee Protestantism to the Republicans, the Irish Catholics to the Democrats, the German Protestants to the Republicans, and we can trace these allegiances for decades and generations. Another was the Depression, whose effects on voting patterns were rather more moderate. It had taken a new convulsion to upset voting patterns, and that convulsion to Phillips—though there are scarcely a half-dozen sentences in his book on it—was the civil rights revolution. Because of it, everyone was changing places, if one was sharp enough to detect it.

Phillips's conservatism, and his analysis of the new conservatism that he believed was becoming dominant in American politics, owed almost nothing to economic interests. Indeed, he expected the well-to-do, the better educated, the Anglo-Saxon elite, along with prosperous Jews, to shift to or stay with the Democrats, and to remain their bulwark. That to him is also an old story and he found nothing strange in this behavior so oddly against interest: The Northeast, he points out, is always the bulwark of dying causes, supporting John Adams against Jeffersonian democracy, John Quincy Adams against Jacksonian democracy, Herbert Hoover against FDR. He is remarkably unanalytical and uncurious as to *why* upper-middle-class Protestants and Jews are becoming the bulwark of the Democratic Party, why the Catholic middle- and lower-middle class is shifting to the Republicans. That people get attached politically on the basis of passions is to him self-evident, and his explanations are fragmentary: "The Negro socioeconomic revolution and the related bias of the Democratic Party have displaced the Civil War as the underlying divisors of American politics." Or: "The new sociological [sic] trend of the Democratic Party. . . ." Or: The Democrats in 1956-1960 "were becoming increasingly identified with the social programs and social revolution of the Northeastern Megalopolis." His

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fullest statement: "The same sociological factors which produced 'McCarthyism' and isolationism in the early Nineteen-Fifties—the status apprehensions of the insecure new middle-classes—were engendering an antagonism towards a government philosophy of assistance to Negroes which was not extended to white immigrant groups. At any rate, there is a pronounced correlation between Eisenhower support during the Nineteen-Fifties and 1966 'backlash' urban Republicanism in Great Lakes white urban districts."

But could one see, as early as 1964, and 1968, such a response to governmental assistance to blacks? It seems premature: But antennae sharpened by passions pick up the mood and direction of the times very rapidly. From a very different political background and stance, Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg were making the same analysis (*The Real Majority*, Coward McCann, 1970), and were perceptively naming the new phenomenon, too: "Americans have begun casting their ballots along the lines of issues relatively new to the American scene. For several decades Americans have voted basically along the lines of bread and butter economic issues. Now . . . Americans are beginning to array themselves politically along the axes of certain social situations as well . . . law and order, backlash, antisouth, malaise [this is long before Carter!], change, or alienation. These situations, we believe, constitute a new and potent political issue. We call it the social issue . . ." By 1980 it was to grow hugely to become "the social agenda."

This, Scammon and Wattenberg describe as the central substantive notion of their book. There is also a structural notion: "The great majority of the voters in America are unyoung, unpoor, and unblack: they are middle-aged, middle-class, middle-minded." And this leads to a strategic notion: Both the social issue and the make-up of the electorate require "an attempt to capture the central ground of an electoral battlefield." Scammon and Wattenberg were perceptive in seeing the significance of new issues not clearly related to classic interest-based divisions. They were right about the make-up of the American electorate in a general way, but did not reach as deeply as Phillips into the ethnic, racial, and religious passions of this electorate. They turned out to be quite wrong in arguing that victory lay in reaching for the center. At least, they were wrong as far as the Republican Party was concerned: They may have been right that this was the correct strategy for the Democrats.

But Phillips was tougher, and righter: The country was changing, and changing in a way that tilted decisively against the Democrats:

> One of the greatest political myths of the decade—a product of liberal self-interest—is that the Republican Party cannot attain national domi-

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> nance without mobilizing liberal support in the big cities, appealing to "liberal" youth, empathizing with "liberal" urbanization, gaining substantial Negro support and courting the affluent young professional classes of "suburbia."
>
> The actual demographic and political facts convey a very different message. . . . the big city political era is over . . . [For one reason—the big cities made up an ever smaller part of the electorate: New York City made up 52 percent of the state's presidential vote in 1944; but only 39 percent (and dropping) in 1968. But the big cities were changing too:] Richard Nixon and George Wallace together won 40 percent of the vote in liberal New York City in 1968. . . . While many Northeastern young people are more liberal and Democratic than their parents, . . . the reverse seems to be true in Southern, Border, Rocky Mountain, Catholic, lower middle-class and working-class areas.

There was an unanticipated wave of the future gathering force in the 1960s, as *The Public Interest* heralded an age of pragmatism beyond outmoded ideology in public policy. Phillips was accurate in perceiving it, though it was checked briefly by Watergate and Carter. By 1984, we were all noting with surprise that the youngest generation was *more* conservative than the one that had preceded it.

But what is this "social issue" that Scammon and Wattenberg named in 1970? It is an odd mix. "Suddenly, sometime in the 1960s 'crime' and 'race' and 'lawlessness' and 'civil rights' became the most important domestic issues in America . . ." Are we speaking simply of the backlash to civil rights, as Phillips sometimes briefly suggests? Are we speaking of modern discomforts of very different origins, made into an amalgam by ingenious politicians? As Scammon and Wattenberg struggle to define "the social issue" (perhaps they should have used the plural) we wonder what the connection can possibly be, what this new thing they discern in American politics really is. It is civil rights—but what aspect of it? The clean-cut black college youth sitting at a segregated lunch counter? Hardly likely. Black youths rioting in the city? More like what Phillips has in mind, but what has that got to do with civil rights? And what does the civil rights or race issue, however defined, have to do with "kidlash" (the Scammon-Wattenberg term, paralleling backlash): long hair, short skirts, foul language, drugs, etc.

Are either connected to yet another element they put into "the social issue"—"values"? "Pornography blossomed with legal sanction; sexual codes became more permissive; priests were getting married; sex education was taught in the schools."

I would argue we deal with neither racism, extended and expanded and covered up with an assumed concern with other issues, nor with a politician-made amalgam of things simply not connected.

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There are connections, aside from the negative one that none of these issues impinges on the classic interest issues of the division of the pie in a free-market, capitalist society—or they impinge on it rather distantly. Yet that is no minor negative characteristic: It meant that none of the classic economic appeals of the left could be very effective against such concerns. But there were other commonalities: Almost all these issues involved the unelected Federal courts imposing new standards against community practices and desires. All placed the cosmopolitan sections of the country—the Northeast and the Pacific Coast, the major universities, the national media—against local forces, without the same prestige, connection with leading institutions, or access to sophisticated national media. The major connection between the elements of the social issue is that they all represent concerns of middle-America—another term that is hard to define. But it means Catholics and lower- and middle-class Protestant denominations against elite Protestant denominations and Jews, groups middle by location between the coasts, in the suburbs and the small towns, middle in occupation, property, and income.

Defensive traditionalism

The social issue was in 1970 perhaps still a cloud no bigger than a man's hand compared to what it was to become. Let us recall that the Supreme Court had not yet approved busing as a means of school integration nor yet approved any busing outside the South. Busing was not yet even a potential threat on the horizon in San Francisco, Boston, Denver, Detroit and its suburbs. The Supreme Court had not yet ruled that fifty state laws on abortion had to be set aside for new standards that in effect instituted abortion on demand. The abortion issue was thus not yet a national issue, debated in Congress, inspiring proposed constitutional amendments. The Court had not yet worked its way through all those inflammatory side issues on whether children could get abortions without parental permission or notification. "Quotas" were not yet an issue in 1970, or barely—Federal requirements for goals and timetables for governmental contractors were still being developed. School prayer had already been banned in 1963, and its banning had created a storm, but the storm it seemed had been stilled. It was to rise again.

In other words, the "social issue" when Scammon and Wattenberg wrote was still a nascent thing. It had been prospected most effectively by George Wallace—and he was so closely identified with Southern racism that people who were concerned about moral standards and pornography and drugs and youth behavior but who

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were not racists could not follow him. But Wallace had targeted the enemy of all those concerned with these other issues—the courts, the major national media, the universities, the intellectuals. All it took to make the social issue potent was to divorce it from racism, Ku Kluxism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism—no simple matter, since the heart of concern over the social issue was in the Bible Belt, among fundamentalists and evangelists, in small-town, non-elite Protestantism.

But this was done increasingly effectively during the course of the 1970s and 1980s by those who fought for traditional values. Each of the elements of the social issue, which once had appealed to only small bands of public opinion, were broadened, extended, generalized, so they could appeal to a wide spectrum of public opinion. Abortion had been seen in the North as an issue than concerned Catholics alone—now it is much more than that, and indeed the leading opponents by now are Protestants. Abortion became a symbolic issue, reaching out to Protestants, conservative Jews. It began to reverberate, raising issues far removed from Catholic theological elaborations: the decline of the family, genocide, holocaust, hedonism and irresponsibility, the control of children's moral development.

School prayer in 1963 was an issue that agitated only small-town Protestants of the less elite denominations (though that is a substantial part of America). Catholics were opposed because it would mean Protestant prayer. Jews were opposed because it would mean Christian prayer. By 1985, when the Supreme Court struck down the Alabama moment of silence, it had developed almost the same wide symbolic reach as the abortion issue. It too reverberated with references to other matters, hardly connected, but perhaps connected: school discipline; drugs; dress; authority. As such, it was of concern to a much wider band of opinion than that comprised of fundamentalist Protestantism.

The connection between these key elements of the social agenda and busing and quotas raises some difficult questions. To insist on preserving and defending traditional values is one thing; to insist on racism is another, and the fact that the social agenda includes prominently busing and quotas made it easy to denounce it as racist. And even though blacks are religiously one of the more conservative communities in America, strong in their opposition to abortion and not particularly opponents of school prayer, the traditionalists who extended the appeal of the social agenda beyond fundamentalist Protestantism could not reach out to blacks. They had weakened the strain of Ku Kluxism in regard to Catholics and Jews—not that

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Jewish suspicions were overcome. They made no headway among blacks.

But were busing and quotas part of the new social agenda of a defensive traditionalism, or the old agenda of an irreducible racism? Certainly there were elements of the latter. But these issues in much greater measure represented the former. Busing was seen as—was—an attack on traditional neighborhoods. How can one divorce those aspects in the strong opposition to busing that represented the defense of "mediating institutions"—neighborhood, and local school—from those that represented racism? One cannot. But busing too was not a bread-and-butter issue, it was an issue in which the "non-majoritarian branch"—the Supreme Court—played the key role; it ranged the cosmopolitans against the locals. Along with the Southern origins of the leaders on the social agenda, it tends to tar the whole with the brush of racism. But to consider anti-busing racist is to assert that the great majority of Americans are racist—at a time when all their other behavior shows less racism. We should rather conclude that what is important in it is not the old racism but the 1960s and 1970s attack on traditionalism and localism by the cosmopolitan elite.

And similarly with quotas, which are the one element in the social agenda closest to an economic interest issue. But they are also an assault on a set of assumptions, contracts on what is necessary to get ahead: seniority in union jobs, tests and achievements in professional jobs. That they affect how jobs are distributed among the races is of key importance. But it would be a grave error to ignore that quotas are, and are seen as, an attack on established values.

When we come to crime and pornography, there is no great trick in making these matters of concern to a far greater section of the American population than Protestant fundamentalists. They are. The issue rather is where one focuses in considering problems that are almost universally taken as major plagues. For crime, the traditionalists focus on traditional punishments, and on common-sense notions of how one establishes guilt, as against the incredible elaborations by the Supreme Court of the rights of the accused. The traditionalists have made their case strongly, and have appealed to much more than their primary constituency. Similarly with pornography: There they defend local rights to decide against overbroad national constitutional standards.

In considering how the concerns of the Protestant heartland, ridiculed for decades after the great defeats over evolution and prohibition, have again become national issues, we should not ignore

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one key fact. In the 1970s and 1980s the traditionalists gained the support of many intellectuals and constitutional scholars not on the basis of the *substance* of their stands but on the basis of the *process* by which cosmopolitan values had become national standards: that is, the process of remarkably free constitutional interpretation by the Supreme Court and lesser Federal courts. If one defends localism and federalism as against national power, on grounds either that that is written into the Constitution, or is better suited to a heterogeneous United States, one will find oneself supporting states' rights on abortion as against the Supreme Court, local rights on moments of silence and perhaps even prayer as against the Supreme Court's overextended interpretation of the establishment clause, the rights of local school districts against courts mandating busing, and of employers against courts and Federal enforcement agencies requiring quotas. There is thus a very strong assist given to the social agenda by many who would not want to see abortion banned, school prayer returning, and the like—but do not believe that the Constitution allows the Supreme Court to settle such matters, or that one gets a better country if these divisive issues are nationalized. That in any case is my position.

What the Right wants

One tries to find neutral terms for analysis, and neither "interests" nor "passions" is neutral enough. Nor are they clearly distinguished. The advancement or defense of interests suggests calculation, foresight, reasoning: which is why interest conflicts can be considered less threatening to social order, for they are the conflicts in which one can "cut the difference." Passions, clearly, suggest the opposite, as in the crime of passion in which no time elapses between the flash of anger and murder. But of course this is too neat a division. One can be quite passionate and unreasoning in the defense of interests; one can be quite calculating and rational in the pursuit of passions. The division between economic and non-economic interests is perhaps a better way to explain what has been happening in the United States in the past twenty years. When I say, in a kind of shorthand, that interests have been succeeded by passions, I am far from suggesting that people have lost interest in their . . . interests; or that there is less passion attached to the question of who wins or loses by a change in the tax system or the Social Security system or the different major budget categories. What then has changed? What has changed is that issues that many of us considered parochial, backward-looking, symbolic, unrelated to major economically-

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defined classes and interests, have developed unexpected power.

By the same token, some economic issues which should have power in affecting the public arena seem to have lost steam. Note, for example, the modest effect of very high unemployment on elections in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany. This is not to say they are unimportant. But just as we have been surprised by the power of issues we believed marginal (school prayer? abortion?), we have been surprised by the lack of potency of issues we once would have considered crucial. Unemployment is one.

Why?[2] And for how long?

Three points are necessary to explain what is happening. The first is that this is not the country that was projected by the mass media and the major universities in the 1960s and 1970s. It is that country, in part. But it has vast stretches of conservatism in religious belief, in family behavior, in community life. This conservatism has its strongest base politically in the "Bible Belt," those areas of the South and the border country in which Protestantism is dominant, and in which one finds the greatest responsiveness to the distinctive style of American evangelicism. But one finds this conservatism too in the ethnic, mostly Catholic, working- and middle-class sections of the cities of the Northeast and Midwest. American fundamentalism suffered great defeats in the 1920s and 1930s: It was ridiculed over its futile fights against evolutionism and drink, and the overwhelming issues raised by the Depression and the War reduced it to a backwater in public consciousness. Further, it was identified with anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and Jim Crow: It could survive, but it could not be taken seriously. It is a question whether it even took itself seriously. But it was there: And it had potential allies.

The second point is that this broad band of American religious and social conservatism was aroused by the enormous social changes of the 1960s. It is scarcely necessary to rehearse them.

But there is a third point that I think gives peculiar strength to this new right: It is that in addition to broad-based social changes, which might well have been accepted, we have had a series of key

[2] I should indicate there are long term, cyclical, interpretations for this shift: Albert Hirschman (again), in *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), and Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). Both Hirschman's notion of a private-public cycle and Huntington's that periods of "creedal passion" form a recurrent pattern in American history are intriguing: Neither seems to quite fit a period in which "private" concerns have become major public issues, nor a period in which "creedal passion" comes from the right, and on the heels of one that came, more typically for Huntington's thesis, from the left.

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legal changes which offer a highly visible target for those who oppose these changes. I would argue the strength of "the social agenda" owes more today to Supreme Court decisions than to anything else. The anti-abortion movement would have been a relatively minor affair had the law over abortion remained in the hands of fifty states: New York, Nevada, California, and other states would have had liberal laws (Governor Reagan signed one for California); Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama and other states would have had conservative laws; but there would have been no national movement. There would have been no mobilization nationally around school prayer, with proposed amendments to the Constitution, had this remained a state and local matter. Busing would not have become the potent issue it did had it not been for a series of Supreme Court decisions that made it the norm for the achievement of desegregation. Quotas would not have become the issue they did had it not been for Federal regulations requiring goals and timetables. State assistance to private (mostly religious) schools would have remained a state issue had it not been for a series of Supreme Court decisions radically limiting what that kind of assistance could be.

The right is clearly in the ascendant politically—hardly so (yet) in the mass media or the major universities or publishing houses. The spokesmen for Moral Majority, whatever the extent of their television audiences, do not appear on the national networks or in the major national media—only their critics do. To liberals and secularists the rise of the right is frightening, and yet a few cautions are in order to indicate just what is involved. The enormous changes of the 1960s are not threatened. No one threatens the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act. If anything, they have been strengthened. No one expects parietal rules to be reintroduced in the universities. No one expects *Playboy* and *Penthouse* to be forced underground. No one expects prayers and Bible-reading to be reintroduced in public schools. The issues that now so arouse the nation and frighten the left are all questions of the protection of conservative enclaves into which national liberalizing and secularizing power moved like a bulldozer under the protection of the non-elected branch of government.

What is demanded by those pushing for the social agenda is that the Supreme Court return control over abortion to the states; that it return control over moments of silence and other poor substitutes for prayer and Bible-reading to states and local school districts; that it allow local school districts to assign students without regard to race, and with regard to neighborhood; that it accept the relevance

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of merit to professional school admissions and jobs, the legitimacy of seniority as a principle governing hiring, promotions, and firings; that it allow for a rule of reason in judging the guilt of the accused; that it allow local option on pornography.

The argument is not, note, that abortion should be banned (though in some states it will come to that), that school prayer should be reinstituted (though in some districts it would come to that), that we have a national Comstock Act (though in some communities the equivalent would prevail). It is far from a reversal of the social revolution of the 1960s that the traditionalists are calling for: Rather, they are defending traditional enclaves that don't want to be a part of that revolution, and believe they have the right under the Constitution not to be forced to join in that revolution.

This may be too benign an interpretation of the proponents of the social agenda. Power feeds on power, and successes may lead them to go further. Yet I think it revealing that the reason they have gone so far is that the prejudices of the forebears of this movement have been abandoned. It now embraces Catholics and Jews, and would embrace blacks if they would.

The war over prohibition—now forgotten—may perhaps suggest to us a model for the stilling of the passions that have been aroused by the liberal revolution of the 1960s. Consider if you will what would have been the consequence if prohibition had been ended not by constitutional amendment, as it was, but by a Supreme Court decision that local and state control over the sale of alcohol infringed upon rights of freedom and privacy given by the Constitution. We would have had a national standard, and been untroubled in our travels through the country that here you cannot buy whiskey in a grocery, there you must buy it in a state store, here you can buy a drink on Sunday, and there you cannot. As a result of which, an issue that tore the nation apart might still be doing so. Instead, we suffer minor inconveniences and the prohibition issue has disappeared.

There is a resurgent right; it feeds on issues that were barely to be seen in the 1960s. Everyone thought then that the Civil Rights Act would *settle* the race issue—but that was before busing and quotas. The movement's strength is greater than it would have been a few decades ago because it has accepted in large measure the reality of American religious, racial, and ethnic diversity. In response, the cosmopolitan elite must allow that the diversity make room for a largely religious and conservative people.

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Skepticism, meliorism, and *The Public Interest*

IRVING KRISTOL

SOME FOUR YEARS AGO, I ceased teaching courses on urban problems at New York University and, with a sense of relief, transferred to the graduate business school. Bright students no longer seemed much interested in urban problems, and the very term, "urban crisis," now had a rather archaic ring to it.

At the beginning, in the mid-1960s, it had been very different. The word "urban" then had a certain magic—an aura of glamour—attached to it. We were, Lyndon Johnson had informed us, "a nation of cities," so that our urban problems had to be seen within the perspective of a new urban future. And since this was an American urban future, it was assumed that, somehow, it could hardly be inglorious whatever the troubles that had to be navigated. John Lindsay, then mayor of New York, even thought it feasible to launch a campaign for the presidency as the "urban" candidate, appealing to the 70 percent of the population—that was LBJ's statistic—that now lived in cities. Students flocked to courses in urban problems, and departments (or even schools) of "urban studies" flowered. That there was an "urban crisis" was taken for granted. That we could overcome this crisis if only we concentrated sufficient resources

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and intelligence was also taken for granted. Things were very bad; we had it in our power to make them over—and rather quickly, at that.

Even then, some of us were skeptical, a skepticism that clearly colored the very first issues of *The Public Interest*. Indeed, it is not too much to say that it was a spirit of skepticism—not pessimism, it must be emphasized, just a healthy skepticism—that gave birth to *The Public Interest*. It was not merely skepticism, however, about the efforts to solve the "urban crisis" through the Great Society programs, but also—and one tends to forget this—a skepticism toward all of the apocalyptic fears so prevalent in the 1960s. There was the fear of "automation," the anxiety over a society de-humanized by something called "cybernetics." An extraordinary amount of nonsense, both widely pessimistic and optimistic, was infusing our national discourse. A dose of cool-headed skepticism—of "reality therapy," if you will—seemed to be in order.

This skepticism was, to some degree, the product of the social sciences in which most contributors to *The Public Interest* have been professionally or semi-professionally involved. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan pointed out in these pages, contemporary social or economic analysis is far more powerful in exposing the fallacies in, or limitations of, popular socio-economic ideas than in coming up with "solutions" to socio-economic problems. Rigorous statistical analysis always does tend to throw cold (or at least cooling) water on reformist enthusiasm—hence the reputation earned by *The Public Interest*, from its earliest days, of being in some sense "conservative." In fact, only a minority of *Public Interest* contributors have ever been conservatives, or even "neoconservatives." But there is no doubt that if you go around constantly chastening utopian enthusiasm, or offering reasons for curbing reformist enthusiasm, you are bound to find yourself regarded as a conservative element.

Thus, in one of our very first issues Professor Daniel Elazar pointed out that we were not, in truth, becoming a "nation of cities," and that Lyndon Johnson and his staff had misconstrued certain data supplied to them. They had asked the Census Bureau for the percentage of Americans now living in cities. A simple question, apparently—but one to which there is no simple answer. The Census Bureau, it turns out, has no official definition of a "city." It does, however, have a definition for an "urban place"—i.e., a community with a population of more than 2,000 souls. So the Bureau transmitted this information to the White House, which then incorporated it into a notable presidential address, and it came out that

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70 percent of all Americans lived in cities (not, as was the actual case, in "urban places"). That statistic was then picked up by the media, which broadcast it repeatedly and emphatically until it became a "fact." It was, of course, a very convenient fact for all those who believed the nation needed a set of new, expensive social policies directed to assisting the masses of the poor—especially the black poor—who were congregated in our cities. I specify "black poor" because it could be shown that, statistically, the majority of the poor were whites who did not live in cities. But the emotional appeal of the civil rights movement had become so strong that most liberals quasi-automatically identified the "poor" with "black."

I remember discussing this matter, over drinks, with one of Mayor Lindsay's chief assistants, suggesting to him it might not be such a good idea to run for president as the "urban candidate" when the United States, so far from becoming "a nation of cities," had become a nation of suburbs and exurbs. He looked at me disbelievingly and decided that he really wasn't interested in further conversation. That was also the reaction of the journalists whose attention was called to Elazar's article. They didn't challenge it; they simply expressed astonishment and then proceeded to ignore it. Ideological passions—including the passion of compassion—are often strong enough to ride roughshod over inconvenient facts. The idea of a "nation of cities" only faded out of public discourse as it gradually became clear that there was no "urban crisis" to which government could provide a "solution"—only a distressful "urban condition" with which we had to cope as best we could. Unsurprisingly, "coping" rather than "solving" lacks dramatic appeal for journalists as for politicians.

Poverty and pragmatism

One of the more "innovative" Great Society programs that provoked a severe skepticism in the pages of *The Public Interest* was the War on Poverty, structured so as to mobilize the urban poor for "community action" that would coerce government to redistribute income and political power in a more egalitarian way. Practically all of the "founding fathers" of *The Public Interest* had themselves risen from the ranks of the urban poor or near-poor, and they did not think much of this strategy. They saw jobs and education as still constituting the only effective passages out of poverty, and regarded militant "community action" as likely to be counterproductive. But those who authored the War on Poverty were, for the most, upper-middle-class graduates of elite universities who had been dazzled by

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trendy sociological theories to the effect that "empowering the poor" would so uplift the spirits of those living in poverty, would so quicken their incentives to move out of poverty, that the long, slow, traditional climb up the ladder of economic mobility could be circumvented.

In the event, *The Public Interest*'s skepticism turned out to be fully justified, as "community action" became a vehicle for ambitious racial and ethnic politicians to shape profitable careers for themselves by engendering the maximum feasible conflict. But, here again, there was no explicit repudiation of an unsuccessful program. Its supporters simply went on to other trendy ideas, convinced that whatever mischief they had perpetrated was more than justified by the righteousness of their intention.

Poverty, obviously, has always been a central concern of this journal and the approach has been (and is) what is called "pragmatic." That is to say, one does what is do-able, one does what historical experience tells us will work, and one eschews all fanciful, new-fangled theories about the causes and cures of poverty. We *know* how most people, most of the time, emerge out of poverty. There are two key aspects to this process.

The first is economic growth that creates opportunities. A rising tide may not lift up all the ships, as President John F. Kennedy said, but it unquestionably gives a lift to most of them. Job creation through economic expansion is of a magnitude that dwarfs all other modes of stimulating employment—however useful, in a supplementary way, these latter may be. To be sure, not all those ships rise to an equal degree. But *The Public Interest* has always been far more interested in economic mobility than in economic equality or inequality, measured in static terms. Conventional estimates of the "distribution of income," as Mark Lilla was later on to point out in our pages, disguise the all-important fact that it is not the same people who, over time, are frozen in those income brackets. People move up, people move down, and at the margins the movement is much more than marginal. Only a minority, in any generation, make spectacular moves—but, then, no one ever claimed that Horatio Alger's heroes were typical Americans, only that they were possible Americans. Obviously, those attracted to the socialist ideal of an economically egalitarian society—and a large number of non-socialists seem to be so attracted—will remain dissatisfied with this state of affairs. But the world has yet to present us with a socialist society that is either prosperous or truly egalitarian, and there are many good reasons for thinking that this is an impossible dream.

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Just how one goes about achieving such job-creating economic growth is an issue that, for many years, *The Public Interest* did not concern itself with. It was assumed that some version of Keynesianism was adequate to the task. Even now, when economic theory is in disarray and economic policy so controversial, this issue is dealt with only occasionally and tentatively. The sad truth is that disclosure on economic policy has by now become so technical that even those with a professional (or at least keen) interest in social policy find it very difficult to follow. We did publish some early articles on "supply-side economics" (including the first graphic presentation of the "Laffer curve"); we did publish a special issue—which subsequently sold very well as a book, in several languages—on the "Crisis in Economic Theory"; and we do publish, every now and then, an economics article that seems to make sense while being relatively readable. But there is no consensus on economic policy among members of our publication committee—I am, for instance, the lone "supply-sider"—and from a narrow, parochial point of view it is an editorial misfortune for us that the problematics of economic policy should have gained such prominence. For us, economic analysis is primarily a useful tool for an inquiry into *social* problems and *social* policy.

The second key aspect of the process whereby poor people move out of poverty involves individual motivation, including the motivation to acquire those skills necessary to get and hold a job. This, of course, points to the significance of a well-functioning educational system—a topic that has been a major focus of *The Public Interest* for the past two decades. I think it accurate to say that most of our articles pointed to what is now defined as a "conservative" position, emphasizing the need for school discipline and school morale, for concentration on "the basics," etc. "Permissive" and "progressive" education might be appropriate, more or less, for upper-middle class pupils who come from highly literate homes, and who are quickly able to move beyond the basics. But experience has taught us that working-class and slum children *need* the more traditional, "structured" schools. That this is so is suggested by the fact that black immigrants from the slums of the West Indies—where the schools are "old-fashioned" in a British way—end up doing much better, economically and socially, than their American-born counterparts. It is also suggested by the fact that where such education is provided in American ghettos, either in private (usually parochial) or public schools, the young people achieve higher levels of competence.

Any such approach, however, meets massive resistance from our

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educational establishment. Not only has the thinking of this establishment, for more than half a century now, been shaped by a "progressive" educational philosophy, but it is also the case that teaching the basics is a lot less attractive, since it involves so much routine, than teaching classes in "the History of Revolutions," or whatever. So change is bound to come slowly. Most of the contributors to *The Public Interest* find a possible mechanism of such change in offering parents more choice among the kinds of schools they can send their children to. Such choice can find expression in a universal voucher system, a voucher system for public schools only, or a pattern of "alternative" public schools that range from the very "progressive" to the most severely "traditional." Just which mechanism will ultimately be most acceptable politically remains to be seen, but one does have the impression that, on the level of ideas, this battle is at least half won.

Why the poor are still with us

A growing economy and an educational system which, however inept, does work for many Americans, have significantly reduced the level of poverty in the past twenty years. On the other hand, it must be admitted that progress has not been nearly so impressive as one had a right to anticipate. There are, in my view, two reasons for this.

First of all, there has been an unwillingness to focus our resources where they can be most effective. This is most obvious in the case of the elderly. Not that the elderly poor are, statistically, such a major problem. The percentage of elderly poor has been reduced from 25 percent to 5-11 percent (depending on whether one "cashes in" the value of Medicare) in these past decades, and most elderly Americans are managing quite well indeed. Almost 75 percent of Americans over 65 are homeowners, some 60 percent of Americans over 65 own mortgage-free homes, and the average savings account of the over-65 household is $65,000. Still in our affluent society it is a scandal that *any* senior citizens should have to scrape along below the poverty level. Why does this problem remain unsolved? After all, those elderly need nothing but money—not education, or job training, or anything like that—and the total sum needed to bring all the elderly out of poverty is relatively modest. So why hasn't that money been spent to that purpose?

Well, it hasn't been done because a decision has been made not to do it—a decision, incredibly, made by liberals, as well as conservatives. An anecdote will illustrate this point. Back in 1968, President-

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elect Richard Nixon appointed Professor Edward Banfield of Harvard to head a task force on social policy. Ed Banfield asked me to join—even though I had publicly supported Hubert Humphrey—and I did. At the first (and only) meeting I attended, I urged that the limited additional resources available be directed toward abolishing poverty among old people, if necessary to the exclusion of increases in other programs. This was desirable, I argued; it was doable; let's do it—let's win one battle, a clear-cut victory, in the war against poverty. To the best of my recollection, only Arjay Miller supported my suggestion. All the others on the task force—some twenty experts, many of them liberal social scientists—put me down. To abolish poverty among old people would, by itself, be a dangerous maneuver, they argued, for it would leave the rest of the poor "defenseless." The presence of old people among the poor, they explained, and especially their presence on television programs about poverty, was necessary in order to excite popular compassion for the poor in general. So poverty among the elderly should only be addressed as part of a larger anti-poverty program. And that's why the elderly poor are still with us.

Presumably, one of these days an administration in Washington —more likely a Republican than a Democratic administration, I am inclined to think—will simply seize this bull by the horns and put it out of play. Meanwhile, we can expect to continue seeing the elderly poor on television, where they will be fulfilling their prescribed role as appealing surrogates for the poor in general.

The second reason why so many poor are still with us has to do with developments in our urban ghettos. Skeptical though *The Public Interest* may have been about key aspects of the War on Poverty, or about many of the Great Society programs in general, it must be said that no one was prepared for the startling multiplication, over the past twenty years, of female-headed families, especially in the black ghettos. True, Pat Moynihan was quick to perceive the emergence of this problem in his famous "Moynihan Report," and the phenomenon was noted with concern in our pages. But it is fair to say that no one—certainly not the sponsors of the Great Society programs, or even its critics—anticipated that this problem would metastasize so rapidly. Today, it is *the* social problem, since it seems to be breeding an "underclass" that is rife with social pathologies of every kind and which appears to be "out of reach" of social policy.

Why did this happen? There is currently a sharp debate in progress, among social scientists, centering on Charles Murray's *Losing Ground*, as to whether the liberal social policies and programs of

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the past two decades themselves helped accelerate this trend. As is always the case with such social science controversies, it is possible to marshal a lot of evidence pro and contra. My own view is that Mr. Murray has a clear, if not decisive, edge in this debate. This view is based in part on common sense—there really is no other explanation that is credible. It is also based on historical experience. In 1983, *The Public Interest* reprinted excerpts from Alexis de Tocqueville's "Memoir on Pauperism," dealing with the paradox that, a century and a half ago, Britain—then the most affluent of European nations—had created what seemed like a large, permanent underclass, by reason of its generous welfare policies. Tocqueville's point was that incentives to dependency are as real and effective as incentives to self-reliance, and that dependency can be a corrupting, self-perpetuating human condition. Anyone who has had first-hand knowledge of poor people will have little trouble acknowledging the power of this thesis. It is not, as some say, a case of "blaming the victim." It is, rather, a case of blaming the unwitting victimizers —people who, in devising social policy, allowed the passion of compassion to obscure the coarse realities of human nature.

Whatever the roots of the problem, however, the fact that it *is* a problem only a few misguided ideologues will deny. These ideologues are to be found mainly in the radical fringes of the "women's lib" movement, and they assert blindly that not having a man in the house need not be a handicap at all, and may even be a kind of blessing. However valid this may be for upper-middle-class professional women (and I don't believe it to be valid at all) it is nonsense when applied to poor black women in the ghetto. They *want* and *need* a man in the house—to help pay the bills, to help raise the children, to provide companionship. Indeed, more often than not, in their desperation, they have a whole series of men in the house as transient husbands and fathers. This, unfortunately, only aggravates the various social pathologies that are endemic to the situation.

But what can we do about it? Never in my experience has there been such a case—a major social problem before which all social scientists, despite their brave, sophisticated chatter, have absolutely nothing to say. Why do teen-age girls, in an age of cheap contraceptives and easy abortions, persist in getting pregnant and having children? Why do so many black men refuse to take responsibility for their families and abandon them? We are dealing here with one of those mysteries of human motivation about which social science cannot really enlighten us (though many social scientists pretend they can). Another way of putting it is that we are dealing with a

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problem of individual and social psychology that is as much "cultural" as it is social or economic. Such problems are extraordinarily difficult to cope with, since they involve changing people and not simply the conditions in which people find themselves. Changing people is hard, as those who have worked with Alcoholics Anonymous, or with the rehabilitation of criminals and drug addicts, can testify. Yes, revisions in social policy that affect economic incentives can be useful. But we now have a large population whose economic sensibilities have been so deadened, and whose sense of responsibility to other people has been so stunted, that many will not respond rationally to the normal incentives of an economic or social program.

It is becoming more and more obvious that what is needed is the kind of black leadership that goes into the ghettos and works to "uplift" these people. What is wanted is a black John Wesley to do for the "underclass" in the ghettos what Wesley did for the gin-ridden, loose-living working class in eighteenth-century Britain. Reformation has to be on the agenda, not just relief. More and more black scholars and publicists—a Glenn Loury, a William Raspberry—are saying this. But the major black organizations and their leadership still seem to prefer political involvement, with all the preferments this offers. Unfortunately, the one thing that can be said with certainty is that black politicians can no more solve or even ameliorate the problems of the ghetto than white politicians can.

The mind of the meliorist

The failure (or at least non-success) of so much of social policy in the past twenty years can be exaggerated. Not every program failed and there are a few important ones that represent positive achievements. Medicare, for instance, is in my opinion an example of such a program. It has radically improved the quality of life for elderly Americans. Indeed, I am not even much upset by the extraordinary liberalization of Social Security benefits, a topic that seems to obsess so many conservatives in Congress and out. Redistribution of income by governmental fiat may not be a good idea in general, but redistribution from our younger citizens to their elders is an exception to which I would concur. After all, *something* had to be done for our elderly who now live so much longer than they used to—often outliving their children, indeed. And one need not worry about corruption-through-dependence of the elderly; that is the one misfortune they are immune to.

True, even such desirable programs for the elderly can be so clumsily constructed as to be, over time, economically intolerable.

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This is not, it must be pointed out, a peculiarly American problem. All the welfare states of Western Europe confront it, and for the same reason: Politicians do tend to be irresponsible in constructing welfare schemes and their political generosity always needs to be corrected by a subsequent economic reshaping. This is painful and controversial always, but it is slowly happening for the simple reason that it must happen if national bankruptcy is to be averted. *The Public Interest* has played a significant role in coming up with positive programs for such reshaping—one has only to think of Martin Feldstein's articles, over the years, on Medicare, unemployment insurance, and Social Security.

Indeed, *The Public Interest* has always emphasized the modestly positive along with the skeptical. Ours has always really been a meliorist frame of mind. The world is not coming to an end, and American society is not going to collapse, merely because so many liberal social programs have not worked as intended. What is needed are better social programs—though the best are not always identified as being a social program of any kind. Thus, all debates as to whether or not the Social Security system will be bankrupt thirty years from now overlook the crucial new program for the elderly that was put in place in 1981. I refer to Individual Retirement Accounts which, thirty years from now, will make Social Security income of only marginal significance to most of the retired elderly. The IRA is usually regarded as an instance of economic policy, not social policy, perhaps because it involves people doing the right thing for themselves rather than doing good on behalf of others. One suspects, given the increasing suspicion of professional humanitarians as a class, that more and more "social policy" will henceforth take this form.

Even that seemingly most intractable problem, the swelling "underclass" in the ghetto, is not a cause for despair. *The Public Interest* is simply not in the despair business. (One would say that this is a typically American trait were it not for the fact that there are so many Americans who clearly *are* in the despair business.) Those of us who founded this journal, and who have been engaged with it for two decades now, are of a generation that knew a different "underclass"—the "Oakies," the sharecroppers of the South, whose condition was so graphically presented to us in *Tobacco Road* (the first Broadway play I ever saw), so poignantly described in James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, and so much a focus of passionate concern in the 1930s. Where are they now, those brutalized, dispossessed, helpless people? As a matter of fact, we don't know where they are now, or how they got there. American social science tends

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only to study the success or failure of governmental programs, not the success or failure of the American economy or our society as a whole.

In a free society, time is not always the enemy. People do liberate themselves from their problems, whether or not we can figure out how to do it for them. It all has to do with a changing economy, changing perceptions, changing attitudes, a constantly changing "culture." I watch my students at the business school flocking to courses in "marketing," and I wonder: Do they still read *Death of a Salesman*? Do they go to see its many revivals? What do they make of it?

Inevitably, new problems are always being created. But the existence of problems doesn't mean that our world is "imperfect," as is so often asserted. It means that it is still the world, not an imaginary anti-world. And since it is the only world we have in this life, making it a bit more habitable is a pleasurable and satisfying moral activity.

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The revolt against modernity

DANIEL BELL

THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE was the title of an essay by John Stuart Mill in the *Examiner*, January 6-May 29, 1831.[1] It is a peculiarly nineteenth-century phrase: It derived from the historical consciousness which possessed that century, and it sought to encapsulate the way in which a specific time differed radically from previous periods. As Mill wrote:

> The 'spirit of the age' is in some measure a novel expression. I do not believe it is to be met with any word exceeding fifty years in antiquity. The idea of comparing one's age with former ages, or with our notion of those which are yet to come, had occurred to philosophers; but it was never before itself the dominant idea of any age.

Mill's idea, like that of Comte, from whom much of his thinking at the time was derived, assumed some unified theme which set the ages apart by markedly different ways of thought (the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive or scientific phases, in Comte's terminology). Where Mill went beyond Comte, and where his thinking paralleled Tocqueville's, was in seeing the regnant ideas not as abstract conceptual designations, but as ideas, opinions, manners, and morals (*moeurs* in Tocqueville's phrase) held by and expressed (in behavior) by the people.

[1] It was also the title of a collection of essays by William Hazlitt, published in 1825. But that collection was published anonymously and was entirely a set of portraits of contemporaries. Mill's essay sought to define a specific "spirit" of his time. The closest term in "present" language is the German word *Zeitgeist*.

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What was specific for Mill (as for Tocqueville) was the emergence of democracy, not only in the political sense of participation in the polity by a *demos*, but in all spheres of life: the claims of "the multitude" to express their own opinions, and to feel those opinions to be right. To quote Mill again:

> I have said that the present age is an age of transition. I shall now attempt to point out one of the most important consequences of this fact. In all other conditions of mankind, the uninstructed have faith in the instructed. In an age of transition, the divisions among the instructed nullify their authority, and the uninstructed lose faith in them. The multitude are without a guide; and society is exposed to all the errors and dangers which are to be expected when persons who have never studied any branch of knowledge comprehensively and as a whole attempt to judge it for themselves upon particular parts of it. . . .
>
> It is right that every man should attempt to understand his interest and his duty. It is right that he should follow his reason as far as his reason will carry him, and cultivate the faculty as highly as possible. But reason itself will teach most men that they must, in the last resort, fall back on the authority of still more cultivated minds, as the ultimate sanction of the convictions of their reason itself. . . .
>
> But where is the authority which commands this confidence, or deserves it? Nowhere: and here we see the peculiar character, and at the same time the peculiar inconvenience, of a period of moral and social transition.[2]

If there was a dominant theme in American *culture* in the 1970s, one sufficiently distinct to be identified in some encapsulated way (but what is an "age," since we are now reduced in the rondelet of change to thinking of decades as the coin of discourse?), it was the widespread skepticism toward, if not the revolt against, authority —of professionalism, of expertise, of elites and the restraints of law and traditional morals. Whether this distrust of authority—if not of society itself—is a continuation of the phenomenon that Mill described, and represents a further unravelling of tradition and "established doctrine," or whether this is a turning point in a new direction, is a question I shall reserve for a later section. What is unmistakable, I think, is that in the 1970s we did see this (seemingly) abrupt and (somewhat) violent reaction against established authority.

The immediate cause, one might say, of the emergence of this mood was the Vietnam war. Here was an instance where an involvement which cost an incredible number of American lives, and ended in a humiliating defeat, began with almost no notice or consideration on the part of the American people, or even its elected representatives. In the 1950s and even in the early 1960s, Vietnam was

[2] John Stuart Mill, *Essays on Politics and Culture*, edited by Gertrude Himmelfarb (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1962), pp. 3, 11, and 19.

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only at the edges of American perceptions. When Dienbienphu fell in 1954—after the French had withdrawn and Bao Dai, the emperor, had fled to France—both Admiral Radford, as Chief of Staff, and John Foster Dulles, as Secretary of State, wanted the U.S. to replace the French as a military presence in Indochina, but it was President Eisenhower who had made the crucial decision to limit American involvement. The decision to intervene, and to escalate the American presence, was made by President Kennedy after General Maxwell Taylor (the intellectual general) and McGeorge Bundy, the former dean of the Harvard faculty and Kennedy's national security adviser, had made a field investigation and reported the need for direct and sizeable American support, lest the new republic of Saigon crumble. It was a decision supported by the American foreign-policy establishment with no visible dissent. (It is even likely that the State Department knew, or at least looked the other way, when the assassination of President Diem was later carried out.) During the Johnson administration, the U.S. involvement rose rapidly with only small murmurs of dissent within, such as that of George Ball, and some hesitant questions from former members of the Kennedy administration. A sense of miscalculation began to spread, and if there was not yet an admission of error, the situation was viewed, in the phrase of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., as a "quagmire." Yet on the campuses and in the media there was a rising tide of criticism and protest, large demonstrations in Washington, a swell of growing protest and, during the Nixon administration, a serious effort at civil disobedience, the effort to "shut down" Washington itself by blocking the Virginia bridges leading to the capital. The shooting at Kent State University, and the picture of fear and horror of a young woman crouching over a fallen body, became the symbol of American anguish.[3]

I concentrate on this event for two reasons. One is that since the end of World War II there had been a unique consensus in American life—a consensus about America's role in world affairs (reinforced by the virtually unanimous support of the government during the Korean war), a consensus about the welfare state, and a consensus about the necessary role of government in managing the economy and planning for the future—and a keystone of this consensus was now questioned, if not shattered, by the Vietnam war. The second is that the Vietnam policy was shaped and directed by "the best and

[3] The irony of the photo, as was later revealed, was that the young woman was not a student but a "runaway girl" who had been living at Kent State. But that is part of a different saga about America's children.

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the brightest" (to use David Halberstam's taunting phrase),[4] by the academic and foreign-policy elite, and this failure cracked the nerve of the American Establishment, if it did not entirely discredit it. (As a colleague of mine, one of the advisors of that elite, said, quite inelegantly: "We blew it.")

The idea—the phrase—of an Establishment was new to American thought, though of old and "established" usage in England. In the United Kingdom, the "Establishment" represented the fusion of State and Church, as initiated by Henry VIII and continued to this day. To these were added the dons of the ancient universities, principally Oxford and Cambridge, the higher civil servants drawn from their graduates, the peers of the realm—those constituting, in short, the moral authority of the society.[5] Disestablishment movements —the effort to sunder church from state, especially in Ireland—were a recurrent feature of English life up to the end of the nineteenth century; thereafter, the idea of an Establishment was taken for granted; so much so, that the phrase itself had become somnolent.

The phrase "the Establishment" was revived in the early 1960s by the British journalist Henry Fairlie, who used it, in part, as a form of ridicule. In 1962 Richard Rovere wrote a book, *The American Establishment*, which identified the Establishment as within the financial and legal elites, principally in the foreign-affairs field, and named certain figures as the key members. Rovere had intended his book as a parody, but, such is the compelling power of a phrase which seems to meet an unstated but felt need, that the idea of an Establishment was taken seriously and quickly became an accepted and meaningful phrase. It would seem that a democracy, now become an Imperium, and a classless society which hungered to recognize status (wealth was the foundation only of a plutocracy, not of respect or leadership) had found a word which formalized the fact that some new elite was becoming institutionalized.[6]

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[4] The phrase, in its original formulation, actually reverses the order. It was in a Christian hymn by Bishop Reginald Heber of England (1783-1826) that begins:

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning!
Dawn on our darkness and lend us Thine aid!

But Mr. Halberstam as a talented journalist (and former editor of the *Harvard Crimson*) readily recognized that, as a title, it would seem "punchier" if the best came first. Thus does the media rule our perceptions; or was it more subtle, in that Mr. Halberstam, in reversing the order of a Christian hymn, thought that the "best and brightest" were anti-Christ?

[5] The appointment of archibishops remains the prerogative of the Crown to this day, while major professorial appointments, the Regius Professorships, are still made (and shaped by political as well as academic reasons) by the Prime Minister.

[6] But as one member of the literary establishment, an *eminence grise* of the *New York Review of Books*, said, in rejecting the designation: "There is no 'Establishment.' It is only the outsiders who believe it."

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The striking thing was that a "political class" had come into being after World War II: Its members knew and recognized each other; but it had lacked a name and an identity. The phrase gave it a satisfying designation, and the Establishment was drawn, in the first postwar generation, largely from major Wall Street law firms, the financial community, which had become cosmopolitan in its international ties, and the Ivy League graduates, men who had served in and out of government and were available for service; its leaders were men such as Henry Stimson, Robert Lovett, John J. McCloy, Douglas Dillon, et al. These men had thought of themselves as a patriciate, and modelled themselves self-consciously on an English model. The second generation, drawn increasingly from the academic elite professoriate, thought it could institutionalize that role.[7] The Vietnam war was the testing of that nascent Establishment. It failed.

If this had been a policy failure alone, severe as it was, authority might have been renewed by calling upon a different segment of the political class to take office, as happened in England in the dark hours of 1940. In the United Kingdom, despite the deep class strains in the society, there was, until fairly recently, a strong consensus about the nature and role of governance by an educated elite. But in the U.S. there was no such tradition, and the failure of authority revived deep underlying currents in the American culture and moral temper, from the right as well as the far left.

Two strong constituents of American culture have been populism and moralism: a rough egalitarianism which was suspicious of "highbrow" thought, and a biblical literalism which clung to scriptural truths as an anchorage against complexities and cosmopolitanism. It was—and is—antinomian and anti-institutional. This populism had become muted by the mid-century, especially in the culture, as the authority of science and the professions, and the spread of cosmopolitan culture, began to dominate the major universities, the churches, the media, and the cultural centers of the society, even though some aspects of the populism and moralism remained in the political realm.

The loss of nerve of the Establishment—along with other attacks on authority in the culture itself—has meant that the focal point of

[7] The Institute of Politics at Harvard was set up, self-consciously, on the model of All Souls College at Oxford, where the political and academic elite could meet regularly and privately to exchange ideas. That intention foundered on the student confrontation with Robert McNamara during the Vietnam war, and in his unseemly exit by a side door after his private talk. In the last decade and a half, the Institute has become a respectable but populist institution, to provide a forum for political issues, some fellowships for middling political figures, and a coaching school for newly-elected congressmen.

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authority, an influential and confident political class which could have provided voice and direction for the society, was shattered. In the political culture we have seen astonishing phenomena: one president, Richard Nixon, who felt himself to be an "outsider," who hated and resented the Eastern Establishment and sought to humble it; a second president, Jimmy Carter, who was elected as a moralist and populist, and who attributed to a "national malaise" his inability to rally the society in a cohesive manner; and a third president, an unabashed populist, Ronald Reagan, who tells a people not to trust its own government, that the government has become a large barnacle which has to be scraped off the backs of the people.

That there may be elements of truth to all three attitudes is beside the present point: My concern is how such attitudes are used, and what are the consequences. Clearly, in all Western societies there is a growing sentiment against bureaucracy, and even against a professionalism which *asserts* its authority, rather than earns it. In many respects these are central sociological issues of the time. But the response of the populists in the political culture has been to attack the idea of Establishment and to decry "elitism," but to be equivocal on the question of authority itself. Does it want traditional authority and moral tutelage, or a radical individualism?

The spirit of the seventies

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the populism in politics and society had been aimed not only against the Eastern elites but also against the "urban culture" of that region, and against the idea of modernity and modernism in culture as subversive of morals, as decadent and as destroying the traditional fabric of the society. Yet that cultural modernism (in the expressive arts and in religion) triumphed in the society, displacing much of the older "bourgeois" culture, and itself became the regnant mode. (The simplest indicator was the rise of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a satrapy of the Rockefeller family.)

Yet that modernist culture, at its source, was anti-institutional, antinomian, and anti-traditional. In becoming established, it sought, as a logical absurdity but a sociological reality, to institutionalize the avant-garde (the counterpart in culture of the routinization of charisma in religion). Modernism, in the realm of the imagination and the expressive arts, fostered experimentalism, asserted that nothing was sacred, and proposed the priority of the self and the new. (In a deeper sense, as I have argued, it sank its taproots into the wells of the demonic and sought in the expressive arts to shape it or

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tame it, as religion had sought to do in culture and character structure; and this was the source of its great creativity.)

If cultural modernism had remained in the realm of imagination and the expressive arts, then its products—the fruits of its tensions with bourgeois society from 1850 to 1920—would have been (and still are) permanent deposits of the triumphs of human culture. But one can "wall off" such impulses and outcomes only in a traditional or aristocratic society, not in a mass society, one that produces consumers of culture. And in the 1970s—here the demarcation is somewhat arbitrary—one saw the spillover of cultural modernism into the lifestyles of the *culturati*.

The *visible* mark of American culture in the 1970s—I hesitate to say dominant, because such imprints are difficult to measure—was hedonism: a more open life-style, an emphasis on self-gratification, a receptivity to experiment in morals, manners, and dress, the more obvious signs of which were the proclaimed banners of the "sexual revolution," the flaunting of pornography, the growing and open use of drugs, and the other indicators (to some, stigmata) of a "permissive society." What made all this even more paradoxical was that much of this exhibition was promoted by capitalist consumerism and reflected in the advertising pages of mass magazines such as *Life*, of that day, or *People* today.

There are three specific currents in this period which one need only recall, rather than elaborate, as central to that decade: the youth culture, the eruption of feminism, and the emergence from the underground of a homosexual movement seeking an open identity and a set of "rights."

Youth movements have been characteristic of many societies, usually in periods of upheaval; one need think only of the children's crusade, or of the wandering of apprentices and journeymen of the late Middle Ages. What has been different about modern youth movements is a distinctive self-consciousness fostered by romanticism (for example, the idea of a "generation"), and the set of institutional niches created by the educational system, which reinforce the presence of a cohort. When the young no longer inherit the family farm, or take over the family business, or follow the family occupations, the "peer group" becomes a specific mold for social pressure and social shaping.

The decade of the 1970s saw an added sociological twist: a consciousness created by the large density of number, and a cultural cohesiveness created by the reportage of the media (including those that sprang up speaking only to the new culture, such as *Rolling*

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Stone) and the imprint of a specific life-style and dress fostered, again, by commercial interests, particularly the music and record industry. Musicals such as *Hair*, badges such as the "Age of Aquarius," mass phenomena such as "Woodstock," all helped to shape the myth, and from that, the imitation by reality. The bunching by numbers alone was a sociological quiddity. From 1940 to 1950 there had been no increase in the proportion of young people in the society; from 1950 to 1960 there had been no increase; from 1960 to 1968, the cohort jumped more than 50 percent in size—and this cohort emerged as a swaggering self-conscious cultural entity, as well as an economic and social phenomenon.

It is too simple (and often wrong) to assume that the time of youth is a "natural" period of rebellion against authority, particularly parental authority. Some of this imagery has been shaped by the nineteenth-century idea of "sowing one's wild oats"; some by the resentment of Victorian sons against the tether and property held by the bourgeois father, as symbolized by Samuel Butler in his memorable *The Way of All Flesh*. The 1970s was a flaunting of rebellion, yet much of it was a conceit, since the "bourgeois repression" which the youth culture derided had vanished long ago, and often many of these youths were simply acting out, in the open, the closet impulses of their parents.

What gave the rebellion a political edge, of course, was the Vietnam war, and the growing questioning and resentment of the war by the young, who were the ones most directly affected. This reaction took two forms, one highly publicized, the other rarely noticed. The publicized one was the anti-war movement, in particular the opposition to the draft, led by the elite university groups. The other one was the fact that the Army in Vietnam became heavily saturated in the use of drugs, since marijuana and heroin were cheap and easily available, and drugs became an escape from the alternate risks and boredom of war. And as service in Vietnam was a rotation, hundreds of thousands of youths were exposed to these temptations and usages.

The idea of "dropping out," the spread of a rock-drug culture, the open sexual experiments: All may have affected only a small proportion of the youths, like the "flaming youth" of the 1920s "Jazz age," the beginning of the consumer culture. But if one seeks to discern the "spirit" of an age, this is its distinctive mark.

The upsurge in feminism is a feature of the time that will probably have the more lasting imprint on the culture than any other of the phenomena I have been discussing. And its ramifications are still being worked out in this society and many others.

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Feminism is an ideology, and ideologies often do not last, at least in the form in which they originally emerged. Behind the feminist upsurge (and the reactions to it, among other women as well) are a number of sociological elements, each of which, over the years, may begin to play diverse and even autonomous roles. The simplest, and most important of all, is the struggle for equal rights and the end of discrimination, in employment and other aspects of the society. But clearly, it is more than the economic and social fact of being disadvantaged which is at stake. In a deeper, cultural sense, feminism raises the question of the definition of roles, status, and occupations by "gender," and the problem, particularly in the character of the family, of the historically subordinate role of women. The sexual division of labor, within the family and in the society, is one of the oldest features of social structure. The questioning of that division is the root of the feminist challenge. To the extent that it emphasizes a reaction to male dominance and patriarchal structures, it draws from the anti-authority currents of the 1970s and, to some extent, reinforces them.

But a social change of this consequence requires a stronger explanation. How was this done, and why at this time? Any social change is an intersection of two currents: one a cultural attitude, the other the ability to institutionalize a change in market terms. The cultural attitudes behind feminism—of equal rights and even of gender—go back more than a hundred years. Sixty or so years ago, the suffragette movement succeeded in winning for women the right to vote. But it has been the expansion of human services—particularly education, health, and social services—of research, or professorial skills, features of a post-industrial phase, which has given women an economic base in middle-class employment, and which thus has afforded them a continuity of institutional support to enforce their cultural claims.[8] And that, too, one can define symbolically as a feature of the 1970s.

The open emergence of homosexuality—of lesbianism and gay rights—to some extent derives from the visibility of the feminist movement, particularly as some of the extreme early feminists adopted a strong anti-heterosexual ideology as a way of emphasizing their own identity. But that was only the entering wedge. The larger cul-

[8] Take one statistic alone, as a consequence. In 1950, 65 percent of the persons in the labor force were males who had a wife at home, taking care of two children. Here is the image of the typical "nuclear" family. In 1980, according to Daniel Yankelovich, only 15 percent of persons in the labor force fitted that description. The large participation of women in the labor force beyond the clerical and sales jobs that were characteristic of the first half of this century and the expansion of the number of married women in the professional labor force—and of single-headed households—are permanent residues of the 1980s.

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tural change in manners and morals allowed many homosexuals, particularly those in the professional and cultural occupations, to come out of the closet, to express more openly their own sub-culture (in bars, resorts, publications, and so on) and to ask for recognition of their identity. Perhaps the most significant change, in this regard, is the fact that up to fifteen or so years ago, psychiatry and psychoanalysis defined homosexuality as a psychological pathology which needed to be "cured." Today, the psychiatric profession is publicly agnostic on this issue, and a large number would accept homosexuality as a normal condition.

To complete this inventory, one has to include, as a feature of that decade, the decline of the WASP (the acronym for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, which first came into use, according to the most recent *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, in 1960), and the rise of the ethnic as a feature of American life. Most sociologists had assumed that ethnicity was an atavistic feature of modern life, and that with the deeper identification of individuals with their occupational, professional, or class positions, these alignments would be the major axes of group attachments in the country. Subsequently the idea arose that ethnicity is a "primordial" sentiment, an inherent, indigenous feeling of belonging. But the puzzle, therefore, for many sociologists, was how to explain the resurgence of ethnicity, especially among second- and third-generation descendants, as against an adherence to class.

Within American society, particularly in the years following the Kennedy-Johnson administrations and the expansion of the role of the state, political mobilization became an important means of getting "a piece of the (affirmative) action" for various groups. Clustering along ethnically defined lines had long been a means for the Irish, Jews, and, later, Italians to gain a place in *local* politics; and this had been one of the major reasons for the continuity of these groups. But in the postwar years, the *national* polity increasingly became the arena for such mobilization. The blacks, moving up north from a dispersed rural to a concentrated northern urban base, could begin to organize politically and claim jobs and patronage through this means. (It is striking that today the mayors of Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Newark, Philadelphia, and Atlanta, and a hundred other towns and cities are black.)

Concomitant with this development was the growing claim to rights and entitlements on the part of the various groups, especially minorities, from the government in the 1970s, a move so vast that it became, as Daniel Yankelovich and I called it, "a revolution of

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rising entitlements." Clearly, organizing along ethnic lines provided greater advantages for group members; and, as is so often the case in these instances, instrumental choices become mingled with psychological feelings to produce a set of symbols and sentiments that enhance such identification. It is in this sense that politics and culture become entwined.

In a different sense, the unravelling of the traditional culture, and the growth of diverse life-styles, meant that the social and cultural authority of the older WASP upper class became less dominant; in fact, most WASPs began to retreat from public view while their children often adopted the trendy and swinging styles of the *culturati*.

A sketch as broad as this entails several risks. One such is to assume a greater coherence, or some dominant "spirit of the age," than is warranted in a country and culture so diverse as the United States; in effect, one may be deceived by what is *visible* and reported, and miss the undertows that pull beneath the surface. The other risk is that, in the foreshortening of time, one finds it difficult to sort out the transient from the more permanent, and thus one concentrates *equally* on phenomena which should receive *differential* emphasis. These are risks that one must be mindful of.

A decade later, the counter-culture proved to be a conceit, and that youth cohort is settling into a wary, if not anxious, middle age. What seemed to be a new cultural turn proved to be the margin of experiment allowed by affluence, and once the economy took a downturn and jobs became more scarce, the sentiment of rebellion began to ebb. Many of those who have been able to make the transition to professional employment, especially in the media, entertainment, communications, financial and technological employments, or with their own enterprises, have become "yuppies" and have happily expanded the hedonism of a gourmand life-style.

What is more visible today is a new social conservatism which is aggressive in its attack on cultural modernism and on permissiveness, which seeks to restore traditional values, if necessary by fiat or law. A loss of confidence in the national purpose has been restored somewhat by a bellicose patriotism and a revisionist attitude towards Vietnam—though the Congress is still wary of the "quagmire," as indicated by the uncertain trumpet over Central America. But with the collapse of the Establishment, we have no political class, only politicians.

In a larger historical perspective, we seem to be retracing certain old paths. What is interesting, if one looks at the United States a

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hundred years ago, was the degree of *laissez-faire* in the economy (and the striking-down of any efforts at regulation by the Supreme Court under Mr. Justice Field) and the strict regulation of morals, as in the blue laws, the temperance laws, and the views of Mrs. Grundy. A hundred years later, there had occurred a curious crossover. In the economy, there was a strong degree of government intervention and regulation, while in the area of morals and manners there was a large degree of *laissez-passer*. Today there seems to be a move back along the tracks of that old crossover. But historical parallels are seductive and often misleading. History does have a strong "drag" in the continuity of culture and institutions, and neglect of that understanding has often been fatal to sociology. But neither do historical eras repeat themselves in cycles, for other forces also come into play. And today some new elements are coming to the fore as well, even if, paradoxically, in the guise of the old. And this is what we need to track.

Modernity on trial

If the 1970s "decade" saw a revolt against authority, that of the 1980s is seeing a revolt against modernity. And if the one arose from "the Left," the other is coming from "the Right." And yet, these are not crosscurrents but in one sense continuations for, as I have indicated, both movements have drawn upon the deeper antinomian, anti-institutional, populist currents in American culture and history. And, since no strong cultural current runs only within national furrows, one has to see the revolt against modernity as part of a worldwide tide that has been gathering force in recent years.

Modernity as a world outlook draws from many different springs.[9] One of these is a radical individualism in which achievement is linked to the efforts of individuals to free themselves from ascriptive ties and to make their own way—economically, in the Anglo-American societies—in the world. In its strongest version, it draws from the French Revolution and the idea that men, by their own efforts, should—and can—tear up society by the roots and remake it by design. (The force of ideology is to tie an *idea* to a *will*.) What unites all such efforts is a repudiation of the past and an orientation to the future. If, then, there is a common thread to the various revolts against modernity, it is the emphasis on continuity

[9] To minimize any possible confusions, I think of *modernity* as a world outlook whose emphasis in life and thought is on *experience*, rather than tradition, as the touchstone of judgment. *Modernism* is a current in culture which expresses that outlook in symbolic and expressive terms. *Modernism* also has a specific religious connotation that I discuss below.

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and tradition, and against secularism and the universalism which was the utopia of the Enlightenment.

Any inchoate effort—for it is not a single doctrine or creed—follows its own cultural grooves, for different movements seek to forestall, or reach against different facets of modernity. The most sweeping effort of all, as we have seen in recent years, is that of Islamic fundamentalism, and the rule of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. What Khomeini has installed is a theocratic regime which fuses religion and politics, against the Shah's modernizing effort to separate politics and religion and even to include diverse faiths within the polity.[10] Religious belief has been the rock of the resistance to modernity: There is no secular realm; the Koran rules in all areas of life.

The Panglossian idea that fundamentalist regimes are bound only to be transitory or to fail, because they seem to be "anti-technological," misreads the relation of technology to culture. Nazi Germany was one of the first movements of anti-modernity, drawing deeply on the romanticism of blood and soil, of the mythic close-knit *Volk* and *Gemeinde* against the impersonal *Gesellschaft* of enterprise and the rootless cosmopolitanism of the modern world, yet Hitler was able to combine this frenzy with the most advanced technological military machine in the world. (And one can also observe the irony that Khomeini's revolution was made possible by his adroit use, from exile, of the most modern media of communication: the telephone [with direct dialing from Paris], a tape recorder [which rebroadcast those messages in the mosques], and television.)

The spiritual impoverishment of the West had been the constant theme of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Economic development, material goods, the gaudy trappings of the consumer culture—what is the value of all these if, in this Faustian bargain, man has given up his soul? Human beings realize themselves, Solzhenitsyn believes, by

[10] As Bernard Lewis points out, in October 1962 the Shah's government promulgated a law which was a step towards the creation of representative institutions in Iran. The religious leaders opposed the law on three grounds: It gave Iranian women the vote for the first time; it did not restrict eligibility or even the franchise to Moslems; and it provided a formula of oath by which elected councilors would swear not on the Koran but on the "holy book," a form of words intended to accommodate elected councilors of other faiths. Because of the vigorous opposition of the preachers and teachers in the mosques, the law was privately and then publicly suspended.

Encouraged by this victory, Khomeini launched a new attack the following year, on the Shah's new land-reform law and the schemes of modernization, which he denounced as "in the interests of the Jews, America and Israel." In June 1963, Khomeini was arrested and, after his release a year later, in November 1964, sent into exile. The forces of modernization seemed to be inexorable, and no one outside Iran paid attention to Khomeini, or other leaders of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East. (See "How Khomeini Made It," a review essay by Bernard Lewis, *New York Review of Books*, January 17, 1985.)

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suffering and the purification of the self, the rejection of egoism, by the understanding of that existential experience. In this respect, Solzhenitsyn has returned to the themes that were expressed powerfully eighty years ago by a group of Russian religious thinkers who had published a set of essays, *Vekhi (Landmarks)*, in 1905. These men—Nikolai Berdyaev, Mikhail Bulgakov, Peter Struve, Semyon Frank—had been rationalists, modernizers, radicals, and even Marxists; but as they came to perceive, particularly in the essays of Semyon Frank, that Bolshevism was a secular religion (the first to make this analysis and judgment), they repudiated Marxism, and almost all, in one path or another, turned to orthodox religious beliefs.

The move against modernity gains force today in the renewed attack within the Catholic Church by John Paul II against *Modernism*. The condemnation of Modernism goes back to the encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, in 1870, and was renewed by the statement of Pius X in 1907, *Lamentabili*, which defined Modernism as the summation and essence of every heresy. John Paul II has fused the two: He has restated the Church's orthodoxy on morals and beliefs, but also utilized the emphasis on social and economic justice from *Rerum Novarum*. Interestingly, in these matters, the Church is radical in economics and conservative in theological doctrine. Since the family, not the individual, is the relevant unit of society, the Church has never fully accepted the market principle (especially for wages) and implicitly accepts a labor theory of value as in the concept of a "just price." (For an elaboration, see the writings of the neglected Catholic economist Heinrich Pesch.)

Nor is the reaction against modernity limited to the "right." One finds in such figures as Rudolf Bahro, the former East German Communist and the guru of the "Greens," a virulent anti-industrial, anti-technological outlook, one which has carried him now into a form of Indian mysticism and a retreat to an ashram. (But can the entire world become an ashram?)

The United States, too, in recent years has witnessed a reaction against modernity—in the more raucous forms of the Moral Majority, the "New Right," the Christian Right, and in the varied efforts of the Reagan administration to instill school prayer, to repeal public money for abortion, if not to outlaw abortion completely, to return to "basics" in education, to set forth a moral rhetoric as the scaffolding of political legislation. It is a return of the repressed.

The history of American politics and culture, one might say, is the recurrent tension between traditionalism and modernity. Traditionalism has its roots in the small-town life of America and its fun-

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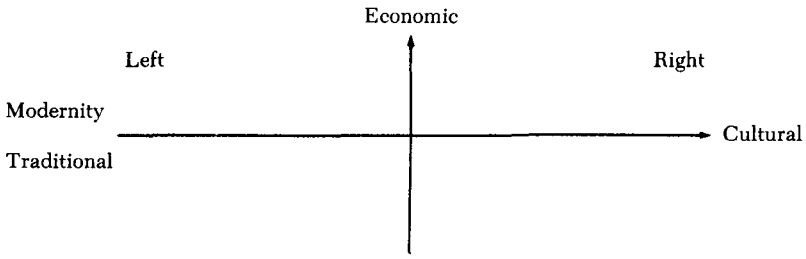
damentalist Protestantism. Modernity is the expansion of liberal and cosmopolitan attitudes in the cities. The fear of the city has long been a theme in American life. Yet it has not been a simple either/or, for the axis of traditionalism and modernity has crossed the axis of economic interest, the conventional left-and-right distinction. Thus, one can see the alignments by a schematic diagram:



At different times, one or another of the axes has been salient, and groups within those "boxes" have been the spear-points of conflict. The "left" traditionalism has historically been the populist movements, those of Tom Watson and William Jennings Bryan, which have been fundamentalist on cultural matters (such as Bryan's defense of creationism against Clarence Darrow, in the Scopes trial in the 1920s), yet radical on economic questions, fearing the rule of the bankers and the Jews, and charging a conspiracy of the money trust to gain economic advantage. The "right" traditionalists have been the small-town merchants and manufacturers, anchored to older Protestant beliefs, whose major political effort was in the 1920s, in the temperance crusade, the successful effort to impose a specific moral belief, the prohibition of alcohol, on the society. In the 1950s, Joseph McCarthy demagogically used the populist rhetoric, but, where the older line had been Wall Street vs. Main Street, McCarthy transposed the demons from Wall Street to Communists and subversives.[11]

McCarthy was put down not by the liberals, but by a Republican right that represented the older elites and took somewhat seriously their role as an Establishment. What is extraordinary today is the new rhetoric of Ronald Reagan. Reagan carries the banner of

[11] These were the themes of the two compendiums I edited, *The New American Right* (1955) and the expanded version, *The Radical Right* (1964), especially the essays of Richard Hofstadter, S. M. Lipset, and myself. The sharpest analysis of the populist mentality is that of Hofstadter, in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*. The first exposé of the relation of populism to anti-Semitism was my essay, "The Grass-Roots of American Jew Hatred," in *The Jewish Frontier* (1944). One of the best treatments of traditional/modernity distinctions, focusing on the temperance movement, is Joseph Gusfield's *Symbolic Crusade* (1966).

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populism, but added to the list of enemies is not only the external Soviet threat, but liberalism itself.

It is a very strange brew and a peculiar set of contradictions. Mr. Reagan asserts authority in the moral sphere yet attacks authority in his political populism. The reaction against modernity in culture goes hand in hand with individualism (modernity) in the economy. The populist conservative seeks to instill public tutelage in private moral conduct and to remove all public restraint on private economic conduct. Mr. Reagan wants a strong government (undergirded by a strong military) in foreign affairs, and a weak government (with little social responsibility for the general welfare) in domestic affairs. He recalls the Founding Fathers, the brightest group of intellectuals in American thought, yet speaks an anti-intellectualism in his rhetoric and his attacks on liberalism.

This set of contradictions carries over among the neoconservatives as well. Robert Nisbet, one of its eminent thinkers, has written soberly of the consequences for a society of the destruction of authority, but Irving Kristol now espouses an incongruous "bourgeois populism" as the new public philosophy of the "next" Republican administration. The neoconservative academics initially sought to emphasize social-science knowledge as the basis of public policy, but now deride the disciplines in favor of "common sense." *The Public Interest* began as a journal that was anti-ideological, with the hope that a public philosophy would emerge out of reasoned discourse; it is now enlisted in an ideological campaign against liberalism—though without the sometime scurrilous tone of the *National Review*, which (in its use of such characterizations of liberalism as "the hive") is almost ready to drive liberalism beyond the pale and deny it as a legitimate voice within political discourse.

Philosophical ferment

Any reasoned debate on the nature of a just order or the desired character of a society ultimately has its recourse to political philosophy. The "modern" terms of left and right have long since frayed and lost their meaning, though the vocabulary, now primarily used as terms of abuse, still remains. The premises of liberalism have become shredded because of the complexities of managing a modern economy through fine-tuning, the simplicities and boomerangs of the social programs, and the inability of liberalism to set limits on permissive conduct which it had initiated or approved of. And the death of socialism as a political fact is, as I once noted in these pages, the most tragic political fact of the twentieth century.

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Yet such failures have been (harsh as they are in their consequences) primarily failures in means, not necessarily the failure of ideals. Modernity sought to impose an all-embracing view of life (one of its modes of competition with religion) which was wrong in its repudiation of classical thought (modernity, as Leo Strauss once pointed out, began in political philosophy with Hobbes), the denial of a continuity in culture, and an attack on tradition. Yet modernity was positive in its openness to experience, against the closed worlds of hidebound orthodoxy; in its emphasis on the potential of human powers for a creativity that did not arise out of tragedy alone or out of a finely honed mimesis of nature, but out of the imagination of men framing new forms and new modes of experience and art. In that sense, for example, modern technology and abstract art are also fruits of modernity.[12]

In political philosophy (but not in culture), a new debate is now opening up whose positive virtue is the effort to restate fundamental issues without shadowing them with the older, frayed ideological baggage. The nineteenth-century debates that have carried over into the present were framed, rightly, as the claims of equality against those of liberty. This was a setting framed by Tocqueville, and debated by Mill and Fitzjames Stephens a hundred years ago, and by Tawney and Hayek in the recent past. While the proper relation between the two remains a fractious and vexing political fact, the philosophical ground, I would argue, has been resolved by Isaiah Berlin in his essay "Two Concepts of Liberty."[13]

[12] Among neoconservative writers, only Hilton Kramer remains a defender of modernism. I would differ with him, however, in some of his evaluations. I think he neglects the subversive force of modernism, since he concentrates so much on its "formal" qualities, and I find strange his argument that modernism is a positive achievement of capitalism! The espousal of modern art today by many corporations is a curious amalgam of modernity chic and the status badges of a corporate elite that (lacking a bourgeois history) has no distinct culture of its own to espouse.

[13] As Sir Isaiah writes in "Two Concepts of Liberty": ". . . nothing is gained by a confusion of terms. To avoid glaring inequality or widespread misery I am ready to sacrifice some, or all, of my freedoms: I may do so willingly and freely: but it is freedom that I am giving up for the sake of justice or equality or the love of my fellow men. I should be guilt-stricken, and rightly so, if I were not in some circumstances, ready to make this sacrifice. But a sacrifice is not an increase in what is being sacrificed, namely freedom, however great the moral need or the compensation for it. Everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture, or human happiness or a quiet conscience. If the liberty of myself or my class or nation depends on the misery of a number of other human beings, the system which promotes this is unjust or immoral. But if I curtail or lose my freedom, in order to lessen the shame of such inequality, and do not thereby materially increase the individual liberty of others, an absolute loss of liberty occurs. This may be compensated for by a gain in justice or in happiness or in peace, but the loss remains and it is a confusion of values to say that although my 'liberal', individual freedom may go by the board, some other kind of freedom—'social' or 'economic'—is increased. Yet it remains true that the freedom of some must at times be curtailed to secure the freedom of others. Upon what

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Today, the terms of the public philosophy are being restated in different forms: philosophically it is in terms of *rights* versus *the good*: In political and cultural terms it is *individualism* as against *communitarianism*. Any effort to collapse these distinctions into left versus right necessarily fails, since they do not derive from sociological conflicts. Something more is at stake: the ground of a normative political philosophy and the differing visions of the moral basis for the *polis*, since any viable society is, *au fond*, a moral order in which people share a consciousness of kind and a willing respect for one another and the common weal.

Deriving from Lockean liberalism, the idea of society as a social contract, one axis of debate in Anglo-American philosophy, has been the definition of *rights*: rights as inalienable, rights as the protection of the individual, rights as the claims on society, rights as defenses against government. In recent years, the idea of rights has been central to the thought of John Rawls, who has sought to reformulate the social contract as a means of justifying a redistributionist philosophy of fairness; by Ronald Dworkin, who has made rights anterior to law; but also by Robert Nozick, who, from a libertarian point of view, has argued for rights as prior to government.

Against this emphasis there has arisen a group of political philosophers who argue that some sense of "the good" must precede any claim to rights, for rights can only exist where there are some common ends, morally shared, which allow a *polis* to function. This is the theme of Alasdair MacIntyre in his return to an Aristotelian conception of virtue; of Michael Sandel, in his criticism of Rawls and his espousal of "republican virtue"; and of Robert Bellah and his associates, in their attack on the deficiencies of individualism as lacking a moral ground for personality. In a different way, and from a different route, the theme of "the good" as anterior to "rights" has been the crux of Straussian political philosophy in its efforts (now carried on by Strauss's students, such as Allan Bloom, Harry Jaffa, Walter Berns—*pace*, the amalgam) to reinstate the wisdom of classical political philosophy, with its idea of a natural *telos*, or purpose—that of virtue—which judges the character of human conduct.

Many conservatives divide sharply on these distinctions. Libertarians, such as a Robert Nozick or a Milton Friedman, emphasize

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principle should this be done? If freedom is a sacred, untouchable value, there can be no such principle. One or other of these conflicting rules or principles must, at any rate in practice, yield: not always for reasons which can be clearly stated, let alone generalized into rules or universal maxims. Still, a practical compromise has to be found."

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the individualistic and voluntaristic character of society. Friedrich Hayek, now almost a Social Darwinist, wants only a framework of law, but rejects any kind of intervention in the moral realm. On the other hand, traditional conservatives, those with organic or corporate views of society (derived from von Gierke or from one interpretation of Burke) advocate a hierarchical structure of society, a paternalistic sense of obligation, the need for authority—views expressed variously by Russell Kirk and George Will. Others, such as Michael Oakeshott, skeptical of any doctrinal stance, find a solution in the "natural wisdom" of tradition or the distillation of honorable conduct in the code of the gentleman. And in a subtle and quiet way, Lionel Trilling embodied an Arnoldian conservatism—culture as a bastion against anarchy—which balanced the Hellenic "spontaneity of consciousness" with the Hebraic "strictness of conscience."

Reaganismus, and such epigoni as the *National Review* which fly its flag, finds itself hoist on the dilemma. It begins with interest and prejudice, and seeks to rationalize both. On the one hand, it espouses a populist individualism, anti-elite and anti-authority, emphasizing a ground of rights but justifying these largely in the economic sphere, but in the cultural realm defending a moral tutelage, based on "traditional values" and an unlovely notion of cold virtue. Reaganismus is a political hippogriff.[14]

Is there a "Reagan revolution," or is it only a transient episode in the alternating cycles of American political behavior—a view of alternation held, for example, by Arthur M. Schlesinger and Samuel P. Huntington? In respect to electoral moods or generational and occupational changes, there may be such alternations. Yet the ability to *institutionalize* a set of changes within the American system rests, uniquely, on one institution: the judiciary. Bagehot once said that the Reform Bill of 1832 was won in 1864. In the same sense, the New Deal, as a political fact, ended long ago, but the appointments to the bench of New Dealers to lifelong positions assured the dominance of the liberal political culture. The question, then, is what is the character of the Reagan judicial appointments and what may be its long-lasting effects. The evidence is not yet in on either dimension of the question.

The paradox of reaction

I write, as I once described myself, as a social democrat in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture. I see no

[14] A hippogriff is, of course, the mythical animal with the foreparts of a griffin and the body and hind parts of a horse. But the griffin itself is a beast that is half-eagle and half-lion. Hollywood can do anything with mirrors.

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contradiction in this, for the economic realm is not an end in itself but an instrumentality, the means of generating wealth and finding a just means of distribution within what I have called "the public household." I believe that in the economic realm the claims of the community are prior to those of the individual, for the character of the good society is defined as providing a standard of living for all which allows for dignity and participation in the society. I am a conservative in culture because I belive in continuity and tradition, and a set of "Arnoldian" judgments on the philistinism of bourgeois life.

These older terms—socialist, liberal, conservative—become a web of words that inevitably distort nuance and, more important, locks one into a net because of the associations people have with these words. What I am arguing is that these three positions do cohere because of the *normative* view of society as a "public household," as against the incoherence of the moral views proclaimed by the Reagan administration which promotes an unrestrained individulism in the economic sphere and a moral tutelage in social and cultural matters.[15]

The crux of the issue, however, is the political realm. Here one's philosophy necessarily is conditioned not only by normative beliefs but by an assessment of the nature of the society in which one lives. In 1965, I was associated not only with the founding of *The Public Interest* but also with the Commission on the Year 2000, an effort to lay out some of the structural lineaments of the future problems of American society. In the first report, "Toward the Year 2000," I wrote:

> The only prediction about the future that one can make with certainty is that public authorities will face more problems than they have at any previous time in history. This arises from some simple facts: Social issues are more and more intricately related to one another because the impact of any major change is felt quickly throughout the national and even the international system. Individuals and groups, more conscious of these problems as problems, demand action instead of quietly accepting their

[15] "The public household" is also, I believe, a way of escaping the rigid egalitarianism which ends as a levelling phenomenon, for once a basic standard has been established, what individuals then do with the remainder of their income is their own business, so long as this is not used for the illegitimate conversion of money into claims in other spheres, such as power or status.

The "public household," as I have set forth the argument, goes beyond the older "welfare state" liberalism. One divides a society by talking of a "government" sphere and a "private" sphere. The idea of the "public household" self-consciously sought to adapt Aristotle's idea of the "domestic household," as laid out in the first chapters of his *Politics*, to the modern society. My essay on "The Public Household" first appeared in *The Public Interest* No. 37 (Fall 1974), and is in my book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1975).

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> fate. Because more and more decisions will be made in the political arena than the market, there will be more open community conflict. The political arena is an open cockpit where decision points are more visible than they are in the impersonal market; different groups will clash more directly as they contend for advantage or seek to resist change in society.
>
> For all these reasons, the society of the year 2000 . . . will be more fragile, more susceptible to hostilities and to polarization along many different lines.

These tendencies, if anything, have become exacerbated in the subsequent twenty years. Every society in the world today, with the exception of Japan, is a plural society, with large admixtures of minorities and, in every area, divisive economic, social, and moral issues that fracture the polity. If there is a single overriding principle which any society has to follow, it is, necessarily, the principle of toleration and pluralism, the willingness to practice civil, not ideological, politics; otherwise we end up as a Lebanon, with the brutal disintegration of order, or an authoritarian society where order is imposed by force.

Are there some practical rules, a critique of judgment, that follow from that principle? I think there are two. One is to accept the distinction, going back to Kant, between the public and the private realms, and to accept the consequence that moral issues belong principally in the private realm and are not enforceable through public coercion. The other is to avoid the politicization of cultural and symbolic issues, for these are, by their nature, non-negotiable, and can only invite public conflict.

The public realm is primarily procedural—a good liberal principle—in which the rules of the game are laid out and a constitutional frame sets the boundaries of contract. The private realm is one of individual decision on beliefs and morals, subject only to the rules of the associations and groups to which individuals voluntarily belong. To take a crucial example, that of abortion: Once abortion becomes a *political* issue, its symbolic character makes it non-negotiable and divisive; it can only polarize a society. Abortion, distasteful as it may be to many, has to be a private decision, and no public money should be used. If one argues that, in this way, the poor are deprived while the middle class is not, the answer has to be that private means, from those who support a free choice, would have to be raised for those ends.[16]

[16] I leave aside, for any exposition would be too extensive, the relation of public and private in the economic realm. The market is the best means of creating allocative efficiency, but a market exists within the value system of a society, and this guides the priorities of choice. In Western society, diverse individual ends have guided the price system, but I do believe that one can establish a social market economy.

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What I am arguing is that a stable social order, within a modern Western society, can only be maintained through a principle of liberalism, one that seeks to emphasize the diversity of individual and group beliefs, one that balances the particularism of the constituent groups and the universalism of common rules.[17]

The reaction against modernity, which I believe to be excessive, can only be contained, paradoxically, by the restoration of authority—the earned authority of the professional classes and the moral authority of a political elite. In the past, the break-up of old authority, unsettling though it might be, could warrant a guarded optimism, for the old authority tended to be frozen in its ways, and the new movements, waiting in the wings, heralded a new political or aesthetic vigor. Does anyone think that such a renaissance is possible today?

Yet such a situation is unsettling, for in any society (other than a small one of peers) the loss of authority leads to a reliance on power, and power rules through the implicit threat and the explicit use of force. In all societies, institutions are shaped initially by power, direct or indirect, and by modes of coercion, naked or subtle. Yet power is mitigated when there is authority—an authority based not only on consent (for consent often only bends its knee to power) but on respect. The failure of elites and establishments—for they are intrinsic to every society—to exercise moral authority is, I believe, the most troubling residue of the legacy of the 1970s. Equally troubling is the populist flattering of the "multitudes," and the attack on elites. The present reaction against modernity which carries forward that attack on authority, and which cannot guarantee toleration and pluralism, only invites power or deceit as the principle on which its own reactionary rule would be based. And that is the threat I fear.

[17] As Sidney Hook has written, in defense of pluralism: "the basic error is [the] belief that there is one principle or value from which all other moral principles and values can be derived—the failure to recognize the irreducible plurality of values in the moral economy . . ."

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What is the civic interest?

MARK LILLA

I had just turned nine years old when the inaugural issue of *The Public Interest* appeared in 1965. As I recall, my attention that fall was focused solely on the Detroit Tigers, which is my excuse for missing the first issue. In fact, it would be another ten years before I would see my first copy of the magazine, another five before I would land a job editing it.

I offer this autobiographical note, not to make our long-time contributors and readers feel any older on this anniversary, but to emphasize the fact that, like most of our contributors and readers today, I came on in midstream. For us, *The Public Interest* was a journalistic institution we came upon. Most of us first encountered its articles in college courses in the social sciences or public policy, or we ran across references to it in learned books and journals. While a political slant would have been obvious to those more discerning than I was at the time, for most of us who discovered it in the 1970s, *The Public Interest* simply was the bible in matters of public policy. If you were serious about policy you had to read it.

With long-standing institutions—nations and magazines alike—it is always difficult to recover the founders' original intentions by studying current institutional practices. Things go awry, personalities and environments change. Yet even as *The Public Interest* and its concerns have become institutionalized, and the number of its journalistic competitors has grown, one can still sense that the mag-

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azine was launched with purpose, and was meant to be different from the predictable academic or ideological quarterlies we so often see today.

What is the difference? I must confess that, even as an editor, the original inspiration behind the magazine—and especially its title—has remained somewhat opaque to me. Today, policy journals are commonplace, but I have often wondered why one would have been launched in 1965. And why "*The Public Interest*"? What did "the public interest" mean in 1965—and what did it come to mean in 1975, and 1985?

For latecomers such as myself, there are at least two ways of answering these questions. The most obvious is to ask those who were there at the beginning—and in this issue several of our original contributors offer their views. Another, perhaps more profitable, way of uncovering a magazine's history is to conduct an archeological dig through the strata of articles, series, and special issues, to track the genesis of an idea. One probably discovers less this way about what people thought they were doing at the time, perhaps more about their underlying assumptions. It may also be the best way to reveal which issues were implicitly suppressed by the magazine's original self-definition. That at least is my hope after spending several days looking through every issue of *The Public Interest*, trying to reconstruct the changing terms of debate over public policy as reflected in our pages. I especially wished to trace the metamorphosis of the idea of "the public interest" over this period. And what I *think* I have discovered is the truth of the magazine's unwritten motto: When ideas have consequences, they are bound to be unintended.

Optimistic sobriety

In the first issue of the magazine, only the editors' short statement of purpose gave readers any clue to the intended shape of their enterprise. Under the title "What is the Public Interest?," they wrote:

> The aim of *The Public Interest* is at once modest and presumptuous. It is to help all of us, when we discuss issues of public policy, to know a little better what we are talking about—and preferably in time to make such knowledge effective.

To the jaundiced eye of 1985, that statement must appear either terribly naive or disingenuous. Who today can believe that any magazine simply intends to inform public opinion, or that knowledge can be "made effective"? Yet the editors clearly meant it, for they go on

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to distance themselves from contemporary—that is to say, 1960s—ideological discussions of policy. "It is the nature of ideology to *preconceive* reality; . . . *The Public Interest* will be animated by a bias against all such prefabrications." Ideological writing is "interesting," but misleading; *The Public Interest*, therefore, will

> make room for the occasional "dull" article that merely reports the truth about a matter under public discussion. After all, just as not all mathematical problems are exciting (intellectually, aesthetically, emotionally), so not all social problems are, either.

At times, our readers must have felt we took our dullness pledge a little too seriously. But perhaps the statement's most telling aspect is the simile it draws between mathematical and social problems. Politics is about problems, and problems are to be solved. Our early contributors had no rationalistic illusions about the *ultimate* "solvability" of all social problems, or that certain so-called social problems of the 1960s were genuine. Still, they did conceive of the public interest in problem-solution terms. The editors turned to Walter Lippman, whose definition they took, without undue enthusiasm, as their own: "The public interest may be presumed to be what men would choose if they saw clearly, thought rationally, acted disinterestedly and benevolently." The approach defined, the subject matter was assumed: The foremost issue of the day was the Great Society as the logical, historical extension of the American welfare state. Although we began with articles on a variety of subjects—art, university tenure, automation—*The Public Interest*'s 1965 understanding of the public interest might be roughly defined as the outcome of rational, disinterested, benevolent debate about the welfare state.

It is only with some difficulty that those of us under thirty can comprehend how radical this statement of purpose must have appeared at the time. A display of dispassion must have seemed the height of bad taste when the issues of politics were so emotionally charged. President Kennedy was not two years dead, Barry Goldwater had just been defeated, and the War on Poverty was just beginning. While the Civil Rights Act had finally been enacted in 1964, the police force and dogs of Selma, Alabama, still remained unconvinced in 1965. And peculiar things were happening on the Berkeley campus, leaving parents and professors utterly baffled about the "new generation."

Only in overheated times such as those could our authors have been taken for pessimists. Read today, the early articles of this "neoconservative" journal seem brimming with hope. We expect an article titled "The Professionalization of Reform" to be another attack

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on the "new class," yet Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 article of that title nearly constitutes a manifesto for new-class rule. Sections of the piece are titled "The Economic Revolution" ("Men are learning how to make an industrial economy work. . . . The ability to predict events, as against controlling them, has developed even more impressively . . ."), "The Professionalization of the Middle Class," and "The Exponential Growth of Knowledge." Even in the final section, "The Perils of Progress," where we might expect to read about the economic or political costs of extensive reform, Moynihan's only concern is that "the price will be a decline in the moral exhilaration of public affairs at the domestic level." Neoconservatives, indeed!

Between 1965 and 1970, one has difficulty locating a single voice critical of the general aims of the Great Society. The eventual amelioration of poverty through social policy, the rebuilding of our cities, equal educational opportunity—all are worthy goals, though they might have to be pursued a little more slowly, with slightly different methods. Christopher Jencks wrote in support of school vouchers, James Tobin argued for a negative income tax, and James Q. Wilson suggested that "urban problems" should be approached as "human problems" in cities. The "community action" aspects of the Great Society came under heavy criticism in the magazine, but not their government-centered anti-poverty aims. Indeed, we even published an excerpt from Elliot Liebow's devastating portrait of black urban life, *Tally's Corner*.

In their statement of purpose, the founding editors report one friend's remark that *The Public Interest* was a "middle-aged magazine for middle-aged readers." Middle-aged sobriety is there, even in the early issues. But today we cannot help but be struck by the *optimistic* sobriety of our first authors. The possibilities of sobriety in research and administration appeared great in the late 1960s, even to those associated with this magazine. We can only sigh as we look back at the hopeful articles on PPBS (Planned Programming Budgeting System), the need for a national databank, the shape of a national social report, and, most frequently, the possibility of steady growth through macroeconomic management. What social scientist, of any political stripe, would write such articles today?

The attitude of *The Public Interest* toward the social sciences has become increasingly schizophrenic over the years. Our authors seem forever torn between the views that social research is the cause of, or the solution to, our policy confusions. But before 1970 there is very little cynicism—and why would there have been? Few professors had turned their attention to matters of public policy, and none

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of those who did could yet be considered public policy "specialists." Economists, sociologists, and political scientists were free to go to Washington or write for *The Public Interest*, but these were sidelines to ordinary disciplinary pursuits. Our early articles read like gentlemanly essays, not dissertation chapters. There were no major schools of public policy at which to teach, almost no other public policy journals for which to write. If the first five years of *The Public Interest* are any guide, public policy research must have seemed a very disorganized, undeveloped enterprise, but one that held great promise for those committed to the future of the welfare state.

The atomized welfare state

This hopefulness was not to last long—at least not in the pages of *The Public Interest*. If one compares the articles published in the five years before and five years after 1970, one cannot but be struck by the growing skepticism about government's ability to deliver on the promises of the Great Society. Proposals for national health insurance, it appeared, would probably increase costs without significantly improving the health of the average American. Revenue sharing, which was intended to redistribute power and resources to state and local governments, would only succeed in making those lower levels as bureaucratic and inept as national government. Busing, it turned out, was having no appreciable effect on pupil achievement or racial harmony in the schools. Active regulatory agencies seemed out of control, colluding with business or unintentionally raising costs for consumers they hoped to protect. Housing, job training, day care, mass transportation—all the problems, and all the most obvious programs created to solve them, suddenly seemed economically and politically more complicated than anyone had expected. By 1974 we could publish a backward-looking special issue on "The Great Society: Lessons for the Future"; and while each contributor tried to salvage what he could from a decade's experience, even the guest editors had to note "the extent of disappointment, discontent, and disarray among the long-term protagonists of social reform."

One senses no uniform retreat from the welfare state among our contributors, but one does sense a pause. As the 1970s wore on, it became harder and harder to speak of "social reform" or even "welfare" or "urban policy" at any level of abstraction. So many programs had been created, so many experiments attempted, that the questions became: *which* welfare program, *which* grant-in-aid? Our articles became more specialized as social scientists attempted

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to keep track of evidence regarding (or even the names of) CETA, UMTA, CDBGs, scores of housing grants, and countless health programs. With so many programs and overlapping groups of beneficiaries, it became nearly impossible to disentangle the costs and benefits of a growing proportion of public expenditures.

The diversion of the reform impulse into these tiny tributaries was reflected in a growing specialization in *The Public Interest*'s articles. Less space is devoted to general reflections on society—the "technology gap," the "twilight of authority," the "post-industrial society"—and more space is devoted to the widening social policy agenda. This specialization in turn reflected a greater specialization among our authors, and, one assumes, our readers. By 1975 a fully developed research establishment, centered mainly in the universities, had grown up to provide government with the research and administrators required to operate the new programs. Centers for the Study of X-Policy—where X might be social, education, health, economic, housing, transportation, urban, regulatory—sprouted up in every state, and no self-respecting university (or college, or community college) can now afford to be without them. Graduate schools of public policy, some new, others just rechristened schools of public administration, also began turning out graduates prepared to enter the social-policy research establishment or the civil service. Professors at these schools, now freed of many disciplinary and departmental obligations, soon were able to devote most of their time to policy research and teaching. (In fact, it is now possible in some places to receive a bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree in public policy, and then obtain a teaching job in a public policy school—all without focused training in one of the traditional social science disciplines.)

When *The Public Interest* began, it was one of the only journals —academic or general circulation—devoted to issues of public policy. By 1975 there were scores, most focusing narrowly on one particular issue. Today research and advocacy can be found in very good journals of welfare policy, education, health, transit, urban affairs, regulation, and many other fields. Such journals are "academic" in style, statistical in approach—and a world apart from the gentlemanly essays we published in the 1960s.*

* This development was not limited to our magazine, as we can see by flipping through back issues of the first such journal, *Public Policy*. Founded in 1940 by Carl Friedrich and Edward Mason, and published out of Harvard's Graduate School of Public Administration, *Public Policy* was a literate, well-written yearbook of articles on policy issues here and abroad. The articles were historically informed, and relied on few statistics and very little original research. (This in the days before the regression-on-demand computer.) In 1969 the yearbook was turned into a quarterly

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The simultaneous atomization and academization of intellectual discourse about the American welfare state has had two important results. The first is that we now know a great deal about our experience with social programs. This does not mean we know what *works*—if anything, we can only feel less sure about that than we did in 1965. But our lack of understanding is not for lack of documentation. Virtually every major social program has been exhaustively studied, as have proposed alternatives to those programs (for example, in the income maintenance and housing-voucher experiments). Most of this research has been supported by government itself: In 1965, federal agencies spent roughly $235 million on social research, in 1975 almost $1 billion.

The second, and perhaps more significant, effect has been the growing hegemony of economics in the intellectual debates over social policy. Now, so many sins have already been placed at this discipline's doorstep that one feels slightly churlish joining the "blame economics first" crowd. But in this case the evidence is fairly clear. Most university-based policy research today assumes an economic mode of reasoning, and most of those who study and write on such matters have a strong background in that discipline. Of course, there are very good reasons for this focus on economic analysis (in which I include econometrics and operations research). If government intends to spend a great deal of money on social programs, it will want answers to certain questions: Is the program giving people incentives to behave in the right way? Are those incentives too strong or weak? Does the program undercut or outperform its competitors in the market (say, in delivering health care)? Might marginal changes make the program operate more efficiently? These are not the only questions government wants answered, but in an era of tight budgets they will acquire priority. And these are questions economics is prepared to answer—not conclusively, to be sure, but with greater precision than its academic competitors can claim.

Economics became the *lingua franca* of discourse on American social policy in the 1970s. One can see the effects in the curricula of our graduate schools of public policy, and in the many journals now devoted to research on particular areas of policy. The "policy intel-

journal under the auspices of the same school, which had recently begun awarding degrees in public policy under its new name, the John F. Kennedy School of Government. The articles became more specialized and statistical, to the point that, in 1982, it was acquired by the newly-formed Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management, a professional organization for policy professors and analysts. The magazine has been renamed the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*; the articles it publishes are rarely historical or comparative, are turgidly written, and require a moderate statistical background on the reader's part.

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lectual" writing for *The Public Interest* in 1975 was not the gentlemanly social scientist of 1965. Chances are he was a policy specialist, someone well-read in the technical research of his field—but probably in very little else. Policy research had become a profession. And when any intellectual activity becomes a profession, its conception of the public interest is bound to become distorted. The policy intellectual of the recent past, someone able to place politics in greater historical and philosophical perspective, was no longer able to keep up with the programs (let alone the research) of the new welfare state. The new policy specialist knew very little about programs outside his narrowly constricted field, and if he spoke to "the public interest" at all, he was most likely to conceive of it in the language of welfare economics. Pollution became an "externality," public education became "human capital formation," parks became "public goods with free riders."

The Public Interest has tried harder than most publications, I think, to avoid publishing articles of this sort, but it may be fighting a losing battle. Most of our unsolicited submissions take just this approach, and there simply are fewer men and women around who share the original contributors' intellectual presuppositions. "Two cultures" of the policy intellectual had developed by mid-decade.

Of exhaustion and ideology

The year 1975 was a watershed for *The Public Interest* in another sense: From that year on, more of our authors would become critical of the very aims of the New Deal and Great Society, arguing that social reform not only failed to reach its stated aims, it actually made social conditions worse. What one of our authors said about housing programs—that they were "perverse programs by prudent people"—was to be repeated about a great number of programs and regulations over the coming years. A new, more aggressive line of argument was put forward: Whether well-intentioned or not, the attempt to expand government activity simultaneously in many social spheres had been a counterproductive mistake. In one remarkable issue (Spring 1975), we find the relatively unknown David Stockman attacking the "Social Pork Barrel" he saw operating in Congress, and Jude Wanniski introducing the "Mundell-Laffer Hypothesis" that the gold standard should be revived to replace economic management by central banks. (His equally audacious article introducing the supply-side "Laffer curve" appeared three years later, in our Winter 1978 issue.) Over the coming years we would publish articles arguing that a national energy policy would be a

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mistake (Stockman again), that eggs will not kill you, that economic growth makes life safer than do economic regulations, that the Global 2000 report is alarmist, that judicial activism is making children self-destructive by reducing authority in schools, that we are not losing our farmland—and, finally, Charles Murray's famous 1982 article (later expanded into *Losing Ground*) arguing that the economic and social condition of the poor had deteriorated rapidly *because of* the Great Society programs.

Set side by side, Moynihan's "The Professionalization of Reform" and Murray's "The Two Wars against Poverty" read like the first and last pages of a closed chapter in American intellectual history. Not that the debate over the welfare state has any clear winners and losers; the debate will, and should, continue. (Indeed, Murray's book was the main target of Senator Moynihan's 1985 Godkin Lectures at Harvard.) But increasingly one has the sense that all the possible intellectual positions have been articulated, examined, and are understood by all the parties involved. We may learn a little bit more about success and failure in particular programs; we may devise new insurance schemes or tax schemes to help us achieve public purposes more efficiently; we may learn to make other marginal changes in programs. But does anyone really believe that further research will yield any startling new insights that will lead us either to redouble our welfare efforts, or to dismantle them entirely? No. Ideas don't work that way, and neither does politics.

What we have been witnessing in this new aggressiveness is the exhaustion of the intellectual impulse behind the welfare state—a moral-political impulse that goes back to the turn of the century in this country, earlier in Europe. This is not to be confused with the exhaustion of the welfare state itself, which one hopes will remain with us in some form for the foreseeable future. An impulse, especially one with deep intellectual roots, has a life of its own that may be divorced from its social reality. The welfare-state impulse was born before social insurance, educational, and regulatory programs were created, and began dying just as those programs approached their goals. Most of the programs conceived by the Fabian Society and Beveridge Report in Britain, and the New Dealers in the U.S., exist or have been tried; the *impulse* of these reformers is virtually nonexistent today.

The Reagan administration is not to be blamed for this death; neither is the economics profession nor, for that matter, *The Public Interest*. The impulse died a natural death as it achieved political success and faced the consequences of that experience. In some areas

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of government policy, facing up to this experience led to intellectual consensus. Airline and trucking deregulation, for example, were ideas born and nurtured in the economics profession as a whole, and were accomplished during a Democratic administration to the applause of both right and left. The welfare state impulse simply did not figure in. The welfare state itself is sure to continue, and perhaps even grow again, but it will be carried along by other forces: political inertia, research, ideology.

It is important to mention ideology here because it has been one surprising "unintended consequence" of the professionalization of reform. If our earlier writers seemed hopeful of anything, it was that the slow accretion of research on social policy would, over time, make those policies less susceptible to ideological treatment. If not the "end of ideology" and the rise of technocracy, then at least the tempering of the ideological passions of the 1960s was to be expected. This turned out not to be possible—or, rather, to be possible only under certain conditions. Before the mid-1970s it was easier for students of social programs to resist ideology because we were learning new things about the welfare state every day as our experience and research continued. The aims of the Great Society need not have been questioned if one still believed they could be reached by other governmental means. But as the evidence piled up, for and against, it became far more difficult to reach consensus or devise new strategies. As we proceeded up the "learning curve," it became harder for people on both sides of the debate to remain honestly open-minded.

While it may not be the whole truth, I do think this explanation is superior to those that blame our current ideological squabbles solely on "Reaganism" or the machinations of a new foundations-university-magazine complex on the right. Such explanations ignore the life-cycle of ideas, and the "social learning" that has taken place among *all* policy intellectuals over the past two decades. If welfare-state conservatives seem ascendant now, welfare-state liberals might, with greater organization or a shift in public mood, regain intellectual momentum. But if they do, I doubt very much that it will be due to startling new ideas or new research findings: It will have to be an ideological or public relations victory. Though we all might deplore it, the fact is that policy research—no matter how honestly and scrupulously carried out—has now become an ideological weapon because it fits into so much we already know.

Today we are swimming in policy research put out by university centers, foundations, institutes, magazines, and newsletters. Yet

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most of it is utterly predictable—we have only to look at the article titles to know what the conclusions will be. The research is not biased; we have simply become inured to its claims, and we know all the counterclaims. In recent years, only Charles Murray's book has had the impact we associated with earlier research such as the Moynihan Report, or the Coleman Report, or Christopher Jencks's *Equality*. In the realm of religion, the "routinization of charisma" takes place when a sect's founder dies. We might say a similar thing happens in the realm of politics: Once the intellectual element of a moral-political impulse disappears, the "routinization of intelligence" sets in, and ideology is reborn.

One welfare state, two intellectual traditions

So where, twenty years later, do we find "the public interest?" To be honest, I'm not sure. Reading the earliest issues of *The Public Interest*, one senses that our authors vaguely felt that the public interest could be identified and pursued, if not by the means popular in 1965. Today, I doubt many of our authors would say there is *a* public interest to be identified in domestic policy. Changes in particular programs are suggested, occasionally—very occasionally—new ones are proposed, but little is said about their relation to something called "the public interest."

If the foregoing reflections on our history are at all accurate, this timidity about discussing the public interest is not to be blamed on avarice, ideology, shoddy editing, or ill temper. It is a product of experience—intellectual and social. And everywhere one looks, in almost every publication, one senses the same mood: The debate over the welfare state has devolved into economic calculation and ideology, little more. Not that our pages have changed that radically in twenty years. The continuities are still apparent: standard, sober articles on social policy, and a great many articles—on higher education, science, law, political philosophy, the electoral system—that do not fit the mold at all. Yet slowly, almost imperceptibly, "the public interest" became as obscure as the purposes of the welfare state itself.

Or, rather, one idea of the welfare state. Historically, we can distinguish two intellectual traditions that gave rise to the Western welfare state in its current form, and each assumes a different conception of the public interest. The first, which found its earliest expression in the German and Scandinavian nations, sees the welfare state as the simple extension of society's traditional provision of social goods. This social-democratic tradition distinguishes the pub-

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lic and private realms of social life, but sees individuals in each realm as consumers, public or private. Though not necessarily authoritarian, it is "paternalistic," in that it treats the public budget like a domestic budget.

A distinctive variant of this tradition has been put forward by founding co-editor Daniel Bell, who called for a theory of "the public household" in a 1973 issue of *The Public Interest* (and, later, in his book, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*). He defines the public household as "the agency for the satisfaction of public needs and public wants, as against private needs." A tension exists between the public and private, but within each realm individuals are seen as members of society who need goods and services to meet the wants and needs of that realm. Since needs are hard to define and wants can become unreasonable, Bell argued hopefully for a social compact that would revere the past, recognize the limits of resources and priority of needs, and pursue relevant principles of equality in each realm. The public interest, then, is served by the proper management of this public household.

A second, more English and admittedly less dominant, stream of thought treats the welfare state as a question of citizenship, and particular programs as efforts at civic inclusion, and not simply as providing social needs and wants. It has a *civic*, as distinct from merely *public*, understanding of the modern welfare state. A classic expression of this tradition is T.H. Marshall's famous 1949 lecture, "Citizenship and Social Class," in which he treats the preceding 300 years of English history as the slow restoration of citizenship rights lost after the medieval period. In the seventeenth century, he suggests, Englishmen acquired civil citizenship in liberty and the rule of law; in the nineteenth, they gained political citizenship, allowing them to participate in governmental decisions; and in the twentieth, they finally acquired social citizenship through social insurance, income security, and educational opportunity. Each gain was a gain for members of English society—as citizens, not mere consumers. The end of the welfare state and the educational system then becomes, not the provision of needs and wants simply, but the creation of a nation of citizens. And, in contrast to the public-household language of consumers, management, consensus, economic equality, and negotiation, the "civic" tradition (as we might call it) speaks of citizens, guaranteed minimums, rights, and duties.

All developed welfare states mix "public" and "civic" elements in rhetoric and practice, and in this the American case has been no

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different. Both types of thought have been articulated in this century. But the one tradition to which American society as a whole has been most responsive is, I think, the civic. The Progressives spoke the language of rational management and social needs, and only acquired an elite following, while the New Deal was tremendously popular—one might say "populist"—in no small part because Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke *to* citizens, *about* citizens. He spoke of "one-third of a nation"—*nation*, not society, or family—implying that one-third of all Americans were less than full citizens because they were ill-clothed, ill-housed, and ill-fed. However mixed the political motives of its designers, or the actual shape of its programs, the New Deal succeeded in capturing the American imagination because it promised to be a great act of civic inclusion.

Similarly, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s acquired moral legitimacy in the public eye when it made the case for equality in civic terms (and lost much of it with the social language of redistribution and affirmative action). The extension of the New Deal agenda in the Great Society was also secured on the civic grounds that blacks were less than citizens in the public realms of schools, voting, and public services, and in the social realms of employment and housing. John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson understood this, and were our last presidents comfortable speaking of the public interest as the civic interest of its citizens.

The end of social citizenship?

If *The Public Interest* can at all be associated with either intellectual tradition, it is with the "public" rather than "civic" view of the welfare state. Of course, there has never been uniformity in our pages on this matter. But if there is any continuity over this period, it is be found in a telling silence regarding the connection between citizenship and the welfare state. Our many articles on political philosophy generally avoid the issue. Even our more aggressive articles of the past ten years, articles that boldly question the thrust of all American social policy since the New Deal, do not question the terms in which its aims and impact are today understood. With rare exception, the public interest is discussed in terms of the costs, benefits, and management of social policy—that is, in terms of quantity, not quality.

Returning yet again to that first issue, we can see the significance of the magazine's self-proclaimed pragmatic, anti-ideological stance. For in 1965, the excesses of "civic" discourse were apparent: Social policy had become an ideological confrontation, in which

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"rights" were set against "rights," prudent economic limits were ignored, negotiation was non-negotiable. And, perhaps most clearly, no one knew what he was talking about. Simply laying out the facts "rationally, disinterestedly, and benevolently," the editors' inaugural statement implies, would be a large step toward reaching a consensus about the management of the public household. If that meant turning away from the populist impulses of the New Deal, and towards a greater reliance on the language of expertise, so be it.

In this, if in nothing else over the past twenty years, *The Public Interest* was well ahead of its time. This year is the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Social Security Act, and the twentieth anniversary of the Selma march; yet where do we see the civic impulse expressed in those events? Occasionally, in the magazines of the left (such as *Dissent*) or in the speeches of New York Governor Mario Cuomo, we hear faint echoes of the idea of community. But, even then, the community envisaged is too abstractly public: The democratic-socialist participatory utopia, or the public "family," not the civic association of citizens is invoked. Outside these pockets of resistance, the civic has been discredited—in Congress, the parties, the press, the universities.

And perhaps this is inevitable. One lesson that might be drawn from our pages is that any civic impulse expressed in the realm of wants and needs (as in the welfare state) will, inevitably, be overwhelmed by the political, economic, and administrative realities of running a public household. It just may turn out that the only realms in which citizens can be treated in a civic manner are those outside the public household—in, for example, the legal system, armed services, or electoral system. Perhaps the very notion of "social citizenship" is an oxymoron (as Hannah Arendt, for one, tirelessly insisted).

Public affluence, civic squalor

Still, one wonders—especially if one is young and has come to these issues, and to *The Public Interest*, somewhat late. For what is apparent today (at least to me) is less the dangers of the civic impulse than the severe limits of the "public household" conception of the public interest. We have always known that it would be uninspiring; what I think we also know now is that, without a civic grounding, it raises a host of new, unintended problems.

The first I have already discussed: Intellectual discourse about managing the public household seems, over time, to devolve either into academic-style economic calculation, or ideology, or both together. There is a directionless drift to our thinking about the public

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interest in the welfare state, and the social sciences are not about to redirect us. Indeed, they may even point us in the wrong direction. James Q. Wilson, in his contribution to this volume, suggests as much when he argues that economic thinking about public policy has distracted us from the non-economic factors—the ethos of programs and the character of citizens—that influence behavior and the success of policy. Lawrence Mead, in his 1982 article "Social Programs and Social Obligations," makes a similar point when he insists that rights to benefits must be balanced with some duties if welfare programs are to succeed. Ethos, character, duties—this is the language of civics, not of the public household.

A second, and related problem, is the effect that managing the public household has on our governmental institutions. This is a theme explored exhaustively in our pages. In its attempt to control the programs it created, Congress has over the past two decades developed a labyrinthine committee structure and an exhausting budget procedure that keep its attention focused on the minutiae of micromanagement, and away from larger civic purposes. Similarly, as countless articles in *The Public Interest* have suggested, managing the public household has enticed the courts into active economic regulation, administering social services, and encouraging income redistribution. Public debate over domestic policy has become so single-mindedly focused on the distribution of public-household rewards, especially on the minutiae of the budget, that we can hardly expect citizens to take seriously the civic dimensions of public life—such as the duties to sit on juries, pay taxes, and serve in the armed forces—when those in our government institutions do not. To those inside and outside of government, political life has become a matter of signing and cashing checks.

My third, and perhaps most contentious claim, is that the beneficiaries of social programs may, in certain crucial respects, have become worse off as members of our public household. By becoming full members of that household, beneficiaries (a class that includes most of us) acquired what came to be called "new property": rights, or entitlements, to having certain public wants and needs satisfied. But as we made this new acquisition, we simultaneously seemed to lose some "old property" that had a more civic character. I am thinking here of the parks, public buildings and squares, monuments, libraries, schools, and grand public works in the tradition of Robert Moses that we inherited from the era before the Great Society. Those we inherited are in disrepair, and we have added almost nothing to the existing stock.

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Money is much of the problem. The civic property of which I speak mainly derived from state and local governments, all of which are under tremendous economic pressure to support their portion of the welfare state budget. Yet even here we see the effect of an idea, the public-household idea. It is unthinkable today that a significant portion of our expenditures on public wants and needs might be diverted to investment in civic property. And the reason it is unthinkable is that we cannot measure the distribution or consumption of civic property. Who benefits from a well-designed square or well-rendered monuments? It is hard to say. There is no way to "quantify" the benefits of civic property because those benefits (which are often symbolic) are spread equally among citizens, not among public consumers. And who is going to argue for cuts in local health clinics in order to spend more on parks or libraries?

No one will make that argument because we have come instinctively to think of "the public interest" in such narrow terms. When we think about citizens, and what they require to achieve civic equality, matters become a good deal more complicated. How alien we find Simone Weil's heartfelt appeal for such a notion of civic property in her book, *L'Encracinement*:

> Where a real civic life exists, each one feels he has a personal ownership in the public monuments, gardens, ceremonial pomp and circumstance; and a display of sumptuousness, in which nearly all human beings seek fulfillment, is in this way placed within the reach of even the poorest.

In the United States today we live in an age of public affluence and civic squalor. It has been one of our most significant achievements to have provided a decent standard of income, health care, and insurance for most citizens, and a greater degree of social equality. Yet our attention to wants and needs has distracted us from the civic property that ensures a different sort of equality. Members of a welfare family living in Harlem today are probably materially better off than they were in 1965 (leaving aside Charles Murray's argument for the moment). They are more affluent members of the public household. Yet that same family will find it impossible to use Central Park fearlessly, will find the monuments there in ruins, will find libraries on reduced hours, and the subways unusable at night. While this family might be more comfortable at home, it is less at home in the city. The question we should be asking ourselves is not, "Are the poor materially better off than they were twenty years ago?" We should be asking, "Are the poor more enfranchised as citizens than they were twenty years ago?" And when I look at the civic squalor we have bequeathed to the poor in a place like New York, I am not sure the answer is yes.

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A new set of questions

These undeveloped speculations on the civic/public distinction are occasioned on this anniversary by the growing sense that the debate *The Public Interest* joined twenty years ago has become stale. Apart from the specialists, intellectuals generally are bored or frustrated with the politics of the welfare state; there is a deep sense of malaise (if that word can be rehabilitated). We seem to have run into intellectual gridlock. The politics and economics of the welfare state turn out to be messier than anyone had anticipated twenty years ago, and the intellectual labors it requires are not all that engaging. It is hard for anyone to feel as hopeful and interested in social policy as he would have been in 1965.

There are several plausible explanations for this state of affairs. One might focus on the rise of "neoconservatism" and "neo-populism," changes in the political parties, or shifting public attitudes toward capitalism and government. All these forces have played a role. But my reading of *The Public Interest* itself persuades me that our shared intellectual presuppositions about "the public interest" have a great deal to do with our condition. "Rational, disinterested, benevolent" thinking about solving social problems just is not enough; the ends and purposes of government must be constantly reexamined when discussing social programs. If anything, the debate over the welfare state has been truncated over the past twenty years, not exhausted.

For all its radical sobriety, *The Public Interest* in 1965 accepted without question the view that the most important distinction to be made when thinking about social policy was between the public and private realms. I have tried to suggest that our recent experience with the welfare state might indicate that the civic/public distinction is most in need of examination today. We may be learning that aspects of the public realm can at times pose as great a threat to *civitas* as the private can, that public "consumerism" is no more attractive than private "consumerism." This seems to me a profitable and interesting line of inquiry to pursue today. It may be that we have very little more to learn about the financial incentives in housing programs, say, but we still have a great deal to learn about civic architecture and spaces, art in public places, the shape of our libraries and schools, the obligations and duties that should attach to transfer programs, the health of the jury system—in short, about all the civic dimensions of American life today. About public household management we have become quite sophisticated over the past twenty years, but about civic matters we may know less than we once did.

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At a time when the intellectual debates over the welfare state have become both highly technical and ideological, when the only policy alternatives seem to be either triage or maintaining life supports, perhaps a fresh eye needs to be turned to the way "the public interest" has come to be understood. This may require a little more detachment from the hustle and bustle of Washington and the methodological disputes in the social sciences, a little more attention to the fundamental issues of politics. Our early, "gentlemanly" essays provide a good model of the sort of intellectual inquiries in which we should be engaging. Indeed, I can think of no better place to work out answers to the question, "What is the civic interest?," than in the upcoming pages of *The Public Interest*.

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Twenty years of housing programs

ROGER STARR

IN 1966, the Johnson administration was asserting the need for a national program of housing development for the benefit of the nation's low-income population. Such a program in fact was enacted into federal law in 1968, setting precise numerical goals of 2.6 million units of housing a year. Of each year's quota, 600,000 units were to be specially subsidized for occupancy by the poorest families in the nation.

Twenty years later, in 1985, there is considerable agitation for a new program of affordable housing, by which its advocates mean that they want government to build housing with subsidies that will bring it within reach of the poorest people in the country.

A hasty look would lead to the conclusion that nothing has changed in the last twenty years in the nation's dedication of governmental and political energy to the solution of apparent housing problems. Such a conclusion, however, would be more wrong than right. The facts demonstrate that nearly everything has changed in housing on the national agenda over a period of twenty years. The reason for advocating a national program has changed. The measure of housing need has changed. The causes of housing deterioration and low quality have changed. The determinants of where housing should be located have changed. The assumptions concerning the

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future pattern of settlement in the United States have changed. Assumptions about the very nature of the people for whom housing is to be built and the social units in which they are to be dealt with have changed. And, perhaps most crucial of all, assumptions about the nature of the American economy and its ability to respond to political initiatives have changed.

This litany is not meant to suggest that everyone in the housing field now agrees with a new set of beliefs on the subject, or even that most of them have consciously changed their minds about the reasons for supporting the notion that housing is a particularly meritorious use of governmental power or investment of national wealth. The changes have come gradually. Perhaps they are important because they mirror a change in national values that might not so easily be detected in other areas.

Housing and ideology

The movement for housing reform has a venerable history in the older cities of the United States, as a particularly energetic branch of the uplift and social amelioration activities of the second half of the nineteenth century. In its origins—the endless reports of commissions, governmental and private—housing history consists of accounts of just how dreadfully poor people were forced to live in the rapidly expanding cities of the early industrial age. Bad housing became a metaphor for injustice, an ideological affiliation that made it necessary to believe either that bad housing was unrelated to any weakness or perversities on the part of the people who lived in it, or, conversely, that if there were a connection, it reflected what lack of housing quality did to the people rather than the other way around.

That poor housing had a serious adverse effect on the health of poor city dwellers in the latter part of the nineteenth century is unquestionable. Airless rooms and overcrowding, lack of refrigeration and improper removal of soil surely contributed to the shocking rates of infant mortality (one of every eight babies born in New York City died during the first year of life in 1900), tuberculosis, and contagious diseases like diptheria and scarlet fever. The housing movement of the nineteenth century grew up around the idea that public intervention was necessary. Not to create enough housing for people to live in; there was enough already, though it was indeed overcrowded. But that was regarded as the product of greedy demand for excessive profits on the part of the builders of the new tenement houses or those who converted old upper-class residences and

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industrial buildings into houses for the poor. The drive for improved housing conditions was primarily defined by insistence on more elevated standards, more space, better ventilation, and improved sanitary facilities.

The housing movement that persisted until the 1920s was based entirely on the notion that the difference between good and bad housing was largely the difference between the moral standards of its owners. It was assumed that when their reckless insistence on overcrowding their buildings and skimping on construction costs and maintenance expenditures came under control, housing for the poor would be improved and the dreadful state of ill health reduced. No one really emphasized the obvious fact that the diseases that had disgraced the poor sections of the city were reduced drastically long before housing conditions had been significantly improved. Improvements in public health measures—in the water supply, the sewer system, the quality of milk, and in the development of preventive medicine and diet—clearly played a far greater role in the reduction of urban disease than the elevation of housing standards. That does not mean that more generous standards, better light and air, bigger rooms, better ventilation were not good in themselves as props for enhanced family life and community development. But whether they were as important as they seemed to the reform movement in housing throughout most of its history cannot be answered by quantification.

In any case, it was first in New York State in the 1920s and fifteen years later in the national capital, that housing reformers concluded that morality and restrictive legislation alone could not be relied on to produce decent housing. New York State, under Governor Alfred E. Smith, provided incentives to builders with real property tax concessions and the use of the power of eminent domain to acquire sites for high-quality, moderate cost apartment houses for families of limited but working-class income.

Nevertheless, the main goal of the housing movement as late as the 1960s was the improvement of quality rather than mere increases in supply. Before the Great Depression, it had been generally assumed, historically with some reason, that if housing were built, in the normal course of events, for better-off families, the houses they left behind would become available and provide the lower-income groups with better housing than they had ever enjoyed before. The national government became involved in housing construction for the first time during the Great Depression, and then its goal was first of all to save the liquidity of the banking system and then to

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prevent the loss of existing housing through the inability, thanks to deflation, of families to keep up their mortgage payments. The Federal Housing Administration's mandate to insure mortgages on new home construction was intended as much to stimulate employment in the construction industry and revive its entrepreneurship from the Depression stagnation as it was to increase the quantity of housing production for its own sake.

The old arguments about quality, however, continued to be effective, because the housing reformers and the mayors of some of the older cities pointed out that even if families of higher income moved from not-very-good housing into better new housing, the quality of older housing would not be improved, and the slums would remain. In an egalitarian society, housing that was markedly below standards for middle-class families was unacceptable for the poor. In the 1960s many housing reformers turned on public housing for this very reason, criticizing it on the grounds that its buildings were deliberately kept free of "frills" and "amenities pleasing to the eye" (as quoted in *The Ill-Housed*, a compendium of writings on housing dating primarily from 1968, published undated but shortly after that time by Urban America, Inc.). The dissatisfaction expressed concisely the spirit of that epoch; namely, that achievement of high quality for all was the main object of public policy.

Better homes, nicer neighborhoods

The fact, rather, is that the housing reformers who established the standards for public housing design were more interested in qualities other than appearance. Indeed, the FHA itself, when insuring housing for middle-class families able to pay market rates of mortgage interest, paid little or no attention to the aesthetic qualities of the housing whose mortgages it insured. An examination of the pamphlet, *Principles of Healthful Housing*, issued in 1938 by the Committee on the Hygiene of Housing of the American Public Health Association, reveals that it lays stress entirely on those aspects of housing quality that affected safety, light and air, health, convenience, and comfort in homemaking and housekeeping. It was in the 1960s that it seemed possible not only to fight a war in Vietnam and to release blacks from their handicaps, but also to build housing for the poor that would be indistinguishable from housing for the rich —not only in plumbing, but in appearance.

Of far more relevance to an understanding of the main motives for creating housing at federal expense for initial occupancy by low-income families, is the legal requirement, present in the very first

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low-rent public housing legislation of 1937, for "equivalent elimination." That requirement, later somewhat modified, made it impossible for the national government to fund or subsidize low-rent public housing unless each project was accompanied by the removal from the market of an equal number of existing units. In other words, the purpose of public housing was specifically *not* that of increasing the housing supply. The original requirement was modified only by the elasticity granted local public agencies to take credit, as units removed from the market, for homes destroyed in the course of completing other programs than public housing: for example, slum clearance and urban renewal, highway construction, the installation of public improvements such as water and sewage works or parks.

The emphasis on improvement of quality rather than the expansion of the housing supply was shaped by the reformers' dedication to the improvement of human life, not the creation of physical structures. As the postwar period between 1945 and the mid-1960s opened up to inspection more areas in which the conditions of human life did not meet the expectations of good people, emphasis in housing programs shifted more and more in the direction of quality improvement, and less and less in the direction of augmenting the supply. "Quality improvement" required far more complex criteria than the presence of architectural generosity in public housing apartments about which reformers complained in the 1950s (no doors on closets, for example; no covers on toilet seats).

In the mid-1960s, under the leadership of none other than Robert Kennedy, the Democratic Party elite was insisting that the quality of public housing for the poor was too low, and that the ownership of public housing by local government was one of the reasons why. Kennedy claimed that living in public housing was a stigmatizing fact for poor people. He insisted, and a body of opinion followed him, that egalitarianism in housing requires the poor to live in single-family homes owned by themselves, just like wealthier groups in society. They had to live in suitable neighborhoods, whatever that may mean. As the 1960s ripened, federal law and department regulations required that sites for public housing be restricted to middle-class neighborhoods, on the grounds that that would not only permit the children of lower-income families to attend better schools, but also schools with less racial segregation without busing. That many poor families are capable of maintaining their own free-standing homes adequately is true; but many others, especially if female-headed, are not.

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The drive to put low-income public housing in middle-class neighborhoods was not very successful in producing either more housing for the poor or better neighborhoods for them. Actually, the new statutory requirements on site selection for public housing impeded new construction, rather than increasing it. In addition to sociological factors, sites in the mid-1960s were required also to meet standards of low noise levels and freedom from commercial traffic that many exclusive sections of urban centers could not meet. As a result of the higher standards, which were allegedly for the benefit of poor families who might live in the housing, housing was not built at all. An egregious example of the way in which this new set of standards was beginning to impede housing construction was offered to the nation by a federal judge in Chicago. He prevented the construction of any more public housing unless it could be placed in neighborhoods that were substantially white. Since there was no way in which he could order the Chicago City Council to approve any such sites in the face of the strong opposition of what was surely a majority of their residents, the result was no housing at all.

The significance of the movement for improved housing quality is that it went far beyond the effort to impose neighborhood and racial criteria. The best-maintained housing projects in the nation —New York's are an outstanding example—owe their comparatively good physical condition to the care with which the authority that owned them tried to minimize the number of destructive tenants. The federal government's statutes set forth income limitations for initial and continued occupancy, and offered admission priority to several categories of prospective tenants—those displaced by public action, for example. But the authorities were allowed to try to weed out in advance tenants who were most likely to prove to be troublesome to their neighborhoods or destructive to the property. In New York, that had permitted the housing authority to develop a list of personal history characteristics and family problems that were a warning sign of future trouble. In the mid-1960s such "elitist" considerations seemed wholly inappropriate to a nation that had just officially discovered that race, sex, personal history, physical handicaps, and failure to pass mental or physical tests were all invidious bases for discriminating among people. The potential personal problems from which the New York Authority was trying to protect itself and its tenants had nothing whatever to do with race, but much to do with personal history that might have affected one racial group more frequently than another, and so, in the search for better quality housing, and better quality of life in general, the

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authority was forced by public opinion and the federal courts to abandon its formal efforts to keep out the very families most likely to damage or even destroy the quality of its projects.

The spirit of the 1960s laid special emphasis on the interchangeability of people, as though the recognition of crucial personal differences was but a relic of "elitist" and invidious differences of rank. So it was unseemly to distinguish among people who were candidates for housing supply because some deviated from accustomed normal behavior. The most significant change, with great impact on the housing of the 1980s, was the beginning in the 1960s of a drive to release mental hospital patients from segregated housing in state institutions. Agitation by rights organizations, developments in chemical therapy for schizophrenics, and decisions by the courts made it impossible for the states to keep patients in the institutions unless they were judged to be a danger to others or themselves. In effect, what these decisions did to the patients was evict them from housing—the mental institutions—that was deemed to be of inferior quality and put them into housing that was surely of even worse quality, namely no housing at all. Those of the mentally ill who did find housing, found what had previously been available to single persons of very low income—the cheapest hotels and lodgings that had resulted from the disaggregation of apartments containing a number of rooms. These had originally been built for unified families. A primary result, then, of the search for better quality of treatment of the mentally ill was a reduction in the quality of their own housing, and a secondary result was a reduction in the quality of housing previously available to single-person households, many of which were on the borderline between self-sufficiency and dependence on public services. An additional indirect result of the action on the mentally ill was a reduction in the small vacancy rate that existed in many cities in apartments for families of very low income. When an unexpected difficulty hit them, such as a fire or the abandonment of a rental building by its owner, the afflicted family found itself with no suitable alternative living space.

Mayor Robert F. Wagner, elected to his third term in 1961, during John F. Kennedy's administration, articulated the housing goal of New York City as a "slumless city." The slogan was greeted with general approbation by most people of good will, many of whom did not survive to find that the worthy sentiment concealed one of its unworthier concomitants. A slumless city—one in which the worst housing was systematically destroyed—becomes simply a city in which slum dwellers are dispersed on a much wider scale than ever

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before; their housing is not improved, but they themselves contributed dramatically to a loss of quality and perhaps safety in the more respectable middle-class sections of the city. In the spirit of the mid-1960s, government itself assumed that all mortal clay was capable of being turned into a work of art, and that government would guide the hand of the sculptor when government itself was properly guided. That much of the housing in the urban slums had contributed to the spread of disease and to the accumulation of behavioral pathologies to a density at which they tended to reinforce each other was obvious. What was not so obvious to some social reformers was the fact that many of the people living in slums preferred not to exert their energies in improving, or keeping salutary, their physical surroundings. This was indeed a case in which reformers were seeking unsuccessfully to impose middle-class standards on those who did not want them, a futile enterprise. It is quite another matter for housing managers to try to impose middle-class behavioral standards on those who wish to live in low-income, middle-class housing; the wish, and the existence of such housing, gives the housing manager a lever and a place to stand.

The New Towns experiment

One of the more dramatic failures in housing of the 1960s was the effort, echoing a distant New Deal effort, to raise the quality of urban settlements altogether by creating "New Towns" in emulation of an English program initiated in the 1880s when Fabian improvement was an intellectual current of some importance. The British "New Town" movement descended from the ideas for "Garden Cities" put forward by a British civil servant with the Dickensian name of Ebenezer Howard. In the 1930s, it was a privately supported ameliorative program that owed its attraction to the nature of landholding in Britain. Ownership of land was a favor granted by the Crown or perpetuated from original holdings of a feudal aristocracy that had captured its holdings by force. The New Town movement created New Town corporations, each an instrument of government whose purpose was to acquire, by negotiation or compulsory purchase, vacant or substantially vacant land, and make it available for new, private use in connection with the establishment of a new local government, or the extension of boundaries of an existing local government. It is necessary only to put the previous sentence down on paper to make one see immediately that no such instrument was required in the United States. With few exceptions, land ownership had been widely distributed by historic government

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action, and new towns had sprung up with irresistible spontaneity as the population spread westward and grew to unexpected densities in the East. When it was necessary for some political reason to establish a new town, the federal government had ample inherent powers to accomplish that task as, of course, had been proved during World War II when Oak Ridge, Tennessee, came into existence in order to develop the atomic bomb.

No one has totalled the number of new towns that came into existence in the United States between 1850 and 1950, nor subtracted the number of existing towns that simply disappeared because their economic purpose had been supplanted. But anyone who bothered to perform such a calculation both for this country and for Britain would have been persuaded that a policy necessary to loosen the grip of the past on the British was entirely superfluous in the United States. Nevertheless, the postwar American government did try to develop a New Towns program. Its purpose, naturally, was improvement in quality, designed to show that more effectively planned communities were not only better in themselves, but would set a pattern for future urban development. In practice, the New Towns program produced nothing that moved toward either of these goals with the exception of Columbia, Maryland, that, under the direction of James Rouse, an experienced builder with an evangelical faith in the improvement of the human condition, made sound economic use of his own development experience and some of the powers available under the program.

Throughout the 1960s, the governmental involvement in housing was accompanied by a rather large measure of scorn emanating not from the real estate developers, past critics of government housing, but from a widely diverse band of social reformers. The point of their criticism, whose specific issues varied, was not that government should not intervene to create housing, but that the quality of the housing produced was altogether unworthy. Pete Seeger, the folk singer, sang a ballad that attacked the ticky-tacky nature of the suburban tract house, even while reformers of a somewhat different orientation were saying that such housing was the only way to give Americans of modest means a foothold in American life. Somehow, it escaped attention, or if it was noticed the significance was ignored, that an industrial society provides an amplitude of consumer goods that never before was available to a similarly wide band of the population, but that one price for the new plenty was an unprecedented degree of standardization. It was not simply that housing for the poor was standardized in its appearance, but so was the housing for

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the wealthy. In the spirit of the 1960s it seemed much easier to understand the value of everything than to come to terms with its price.

A further characteristic of the support that public opinion gave to housing legislation was the popular notion that the future concentration of the American population would be changed only by the movement of people from central cities to their immediately adjacent suburbs. In the egalitarian spirit of the times, the movement would be welcome to housing reformers only if it meant that low-income families were able to move to the suburbs along with their more affluent fellow citizens. Prodded by reformers, the courts bestirred themselves to strike down local zoning ordinances that imposed minimum lot sizes on land per dwelling unit that bore no immediate relationship to the ability of a suburban government to supply needed services to a population living at a greater density than their zoning laws would permit. The courts, in effect, were raising or seeking to raise the quality of housing enjoyed by low-income families without considering whether the suburban locations in the environs of older cities were, in fact, the places in which such families were likely to find opportunities for employment or other economic benefits. It was an assumption of the housing movement that there was no connection between the improvement of housing quality in a particular section of the country, and the needs of the economy as a whole for population mobility.

As the 1960s unrolled into the 1970s, it was clear that major population shifts were under way. People in their working years were moving to the Southwest and West; people in their retirement years were moving to the South; the industrial cities of the Midwest had less and less gainful work for those who had expected to do the minimally skilled physical work of the smokestack industries. To an indeterminate extent, it seemed likely that improvement in housing quality for the families affected by these changes may have been an obstacle to necessary readjustments in population distribution.

The basic principle in the allocation of subsidies in the low-rent housing program was the existing pattern of low-income family distribution; cities with the largest population of low-income families were most likely to request and receive the largest allocation of low-income housing subsidies. No one dared to think that improving the quality of housing for low-income families in areas where they were already concentrated might be adverse to their economic interest as well as to the nation as a whole. Even less likely were reformers or policymakers to think of the needs of the economy—or its limita-

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tions—in developing a plan for the distribution of subsidies. Since subsidies are, by their very nature, a distortion of the market process of distribution of goods and, not to put too fine a point on it, of people, the market could not be relied on to distribute them wisely. When policy was directed to the immediate uplift of housing quality, not to the stretching of the economy's productive capacity, no one dared even to suggest that housing subsidies should be used for some purpose other than repairing the market's alleged distributional failures.

A mark of maturity

Now, twenty years later, the federally subsidized, publicly owned low-rent housing program has come to an end, except for subsidies payable under pre-existing contracts and for a relatively new program that gives local authorities the means to make major repairs to their aging projects. Nevertheless, in central cities in the older parts of the nation, the housing situation of low-income families is worse than ever. Not only are families doubled up in many public housing projects (in New York City, more than 30 percent of the apartments in public housing are illicitly occupied by second families that have no other place to go), but the vacancy rate in private housing is lower than ever. Housing that was abandoned because it came to be uneconomic to operate when its tenancy declined or its operating losses mounted, particularly in cities with rent control, disgorged the remaining tenants onto the street or into emergency shelters. The cry no longer is to improve the quality of housing available to such families, but to increase its quantity because they have no permanent housing in which to live. In New York City, as in other similarly afflicted older cities, indifference to quality standards is manifested by the drive to rehabilitate buildings that were considered grossly inadequate in their basic design when the hubris of the 1960s was at its peak; by the legalization of mobile homes; by the shrinking of space standards for new and rehabilitated structures; and by the silence now maintained by reformers whose counterparts twenty years ago were demanding economic integration in housing as part of the improved quality of the cities in the future. Even the goal of racial integration has taken second place.

The decline in emphasis on housing quality may be interpreted either as an increasing indifference to social values, which some might lament, or as a sobering recognition of the difficulty of achieving those values by conscious, governmental intervention. The latter seems more persuasive, particularly when the values involve

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intense economic activity, as is the case with housing. It seems that the major difference between the 1960s and the present time is the understanding that higher physical and social standards for housing depend more on the productivity of the economy than they do on the generosity of the government that seeks to establish them. It is also impossible to conceal the fact that a major governmental intervention in the housing market involves a choice between two unpalatable alternatives: the improvement of housing in the places where low-income families are located, irrespective of the ultimate inhibition against economic growth that impeded mobility may fortify; or a forced governmental population policy that would seek to shift low-income families from one section of the country to another, a choice that would affront simultaneously the people who might be forced to move, and those localities selected to receive them.

In an economy that has been spending more than it produces for a long period of time, and that still faces the necessity of continued large-scale spending on the national defense, any allocation of new debt to housing purposes is likely to be modest. Though that leaves a considerable number of families and single-person households (no one knows how many though many pretend to) in severe housing privation, it is probably the only policy choice that will not interfere with a possible increase in economic productivity on which the national standard of living eventually depends. The administration's rent voucher program that, in outline, promises freedom of movement to families who receive the vouchers while protecting their claims to good housing, in detail promises far less: neither enough economic stimulus in the form of an enlarged consumer population for whom builders will be tempted to go to work, nor the certainty that space will be available even for those with vouchers in hand in the sections of the nation where economic opportunities will seem brightest.

What the past twenty years have taught is the advantage of modesty in the pursuit of social goals; not because the goals themselves are without merit, but because the process of attaining them necessarily brings on unwelcome side effects. Recognition of the reluctant companionship between meritorious objectives and disappointing results may be a mark of maturity, even though those still inspired by the glamor of change may describe it rather as decadence or meanspiritedness.

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The Social Security explosion

MARTIN FELDSTEIN

SOCIAL insurance programs of all kinds—including Social Security retirement benefits, unemployment insurance, and the federal government programs of health insurance—have exploded in magnitude during the past two decades of *The Public Interest*'s existence. Today these programs cost more than $300 billion a year and account for more than half of all federal government spending on non-defense programs.

Twenty years ago, the total cost of these programs was only $19 billion. Even after adjusting for the general rise in prices, real outlays have increased sixfold between 1965 and 1985. As a result, the share of GNP spent in this way rose from 2.9 percent in 1965 to 7.7 percent now. For most American families, the taxes paid to finance these social insurance programs exceed the family's total income tax payments.

The economic impact of social insurance programs is not limited to their budget cost and the resulting effect on tax liabilities. The explosion of government-provided health insurance has caused health care costs to skyrocket. Unemployment insurance has increased layoffs and caused higher unemployment rates. And the Social Security retirement program has forced individuals to retire earlier than they would truly prefer and has reduced the nation's rate of capital accumulation.

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Although these criticisms of the social insurance programs would have been an almost unthinkable heresy twenty years ago, expert opinion and informed judgments have changed significantly during these two decades. The adverse consequences of high levels of social insurance benefits have been carefully documented in a substantial number of statistical studies by economists and other social insurance experts. While there is not a consensus on all of the empirical issues, there has no doubt been a major shift in the center of gravity of professional thinking about social insurance.

The common assumption when these programs were founded (the 1930s for unemployment insurance and Social Security and the early 1960s for Medicare and Medicaid) was that social insurance programs were dealing with events that were beyond the control of the individuals involved. According to this view, individuals simply and unavoidably find themselves unemployed, or retired, or lacking resources in old age, or faced with expensive medical bills. In such circumstances, it appears that the only question for a humane society is what level of support is fair to the taxpayers and adequate for the beneficiaries.

Now there is widespread agreement that the conditions of unemployment, retirement, a low level of accumulated assets, and high medical bills are in part the result of rational choices by the individuals affected. It is recognized that the social insurance programs themselves distort incentives and thereby contribute to the very problems that they are intended to solve. Thus, for example, high unemployment benefits induce unemployed individuals to wait longer before taking a new job and induce employers to organize production in ways that increase the frequency of layoffs since the availability of unemployment benefits causes employees to place less value on job security.

A high level of benefits in any social insurance program provides more protection to those in need but it does so at the cost of distorting behavior in harmful ways. The key lesson that is reinforced by the past two decades of experience is that the appropriate design of social insurance programs requires a balancing of protection and distortion. Too little protection leads to economic hardship and human suffering. But protection that is too complete causes distortions that reduce the overall level of economic well-being.

Of course, the design of a social insurance program involves more than setting the level of benefits. A health insurance program includes schedules of deductibles and co-payments. An unemployment insurance program combines benefits based on past earnings

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with benefits based on the number of dependents. In general, a well-designed social insurance program will incorporate features that achieve as little distortion as possible for any degree of protection.

Although economists and other social insurance experts have now come to recognize the importance of balancing protection and distortion, the practice of social insurance has been little affected. The major social insurance programs have greatly expanded in the past two decades without regard to the adverse consequences of poorly designed programs. More recently, however, responsible policy officials have shown an increased awareness of the need to redesign social insurance programs in ways that reduce their distorting effects. The next twenty years may see more fundamental reforms of social insurance.

This article traces the general developments of the past two decades in the three major areas of social insurance: health insurance, unemployment insurance, and old age retirement benefits. For each area, I summarize the expansion of benefits that has taken place, indicate the nature of the new thinking about social insurance, and point to some of the recent policy debates that offer hope that the next two decades may see a more rational development of social insurance policy.

Health insurance

Twenty years ago, the federal government's spending on the provision of health care was limited to a few special groups like American Indians, military dependents, and some veterans. Then, in 1966, the government introduced Medicare to pay for the health care of the aged and Medicaid to pay for the health care of low-income individuals of all ages. By the current fiscal year, health care spending through the Medicare and Medicaid programs alone has reached $88 billion, 15 percent of total federal non-defense spending and 2.3 percent of GNP.

At the time that Medicare and Medicaid were introduced, health care specialists and government officials assumed that these programs would have little or no effect on the total volume of health services and on the cost of those services. They saw the programs as paying the bills that would otherwise have to be paid by the aged, the poor, and their families.

In fact, the introduction of Medicare and Medicaid caused a sharp jump in the price of health services and in the total volume of health care spending. The price of a day of hospital care jumped by 45 percent between 1966 and 1969 at a time when consumer prices

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in general increased only 13 percent. The sharp rise in the prices of health care services, and especially of hospital care, reflected a combination of the increased pressure of demand and the decisions by hospitals to raise wages and to increase the comfort and sophistication of care in the knowledge that the higher costs would be reimbursed by the government.

The rise of health care costs increased the financial risk of illness and therefore induced the working age individuals to increase their private health insurance coverage either through direct purchases or employer plans. Although the American government does not provide health insurance for the general working population, the special tax treatment of employer payments for health insurance is a kind of indirect provision of social insurance. Employer payments for health insurance are considered a deductible expense for employers but are not included in the taxable compensation of employees. This special tax rule, which reduces 1985 tax collections by some $40 billion, substantially lowers the net cost of buying health insurance. A taxpayer who faces a combined income and Social Security tax rate of 40 percent foregoes only 60 cents' worth of other consumption to buy a dollar's worth of health insurance. This massive subsidy increases substantially the demand for very comprehensive health insurance. By 1980, the combination of public and private health insurance paid more than 90 percent of the cost of hospital care. It is not surprising therefore that the demand for hospital care and its price rose dramatically during the past twenty years.

Between 1965 and 1984, the cost of a day of hospital care rose 1,047 percent. Even after adjusting for the overall increase in the price level, the rise in the relative cost of a day of hospital care was more than 282 percent during these twenty years. Experts say that as a result the aged now pay more for hospital care than they did before Medicare was introduced.

The rapid rise in hospital costs threatens to end the current system of health care in which individuals and their doctors are free to decide the amount of care that is in the patient's best interest. A substantial regulatory process has already developed under Medicare to control the construction of hospital facilities and the acquisition of equipment. President Carter proposed a detailed program of limits on price increases. And more recently, President Reagan proposed and Congress enacted the diagnostic related group (DRG) method of hospital reimbursement.

Under the DRG system, hospitals are reimbursed a fixed amount for each of more than 300 types of cases. In the short run, this limits

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the amount that a hospital can afford to spend on caring for each type of patient and denies the patient the opportunity to buy better care by spending a bit more. In the longer term, hospitals are likely to develop ways to circumvent the DRG reimbursement systems by admitting "profitable" patients for short stays or classifying patients with complex diagnoses in more highly paid categories. The government will be forced to respond to these problems with more detailed controls on hospital admissions and treatments. In the end, a market that is distorted by excess health insurance will lead inevitably to detailed government controls.

In retrospect, it is easy to see that a misdesigned system of Medicare and Medicaid and an unlimited tax subsidy for private purchases of health insurance would cause an excessive demand for expensive health care and raise the cost of medical services. To provide protection against the financial hardship of large medical bills without as much distortion of health care demand, the Medicare and Medicaid programs should have been designed with significant cost-sharing by patients.

An appropriate health insurance program would combine a requirement that patients share part of each dollar of health care costs —in order to make patients and their doctors more sensitive to the cost of care—with a limit on the maximum out-of-pocket expenditure for any family. Because only a relatively few cases incur very large medical costs, it would be possible to structure the co-payment and out-of-pocket limit in a way that keeps the vast majority of households sensitive to the cost of medical care while still limiting the maximum out-of-pocket cost to a modest share of family income.

Similarly, appropriate tax rules would restrict the tax subsidy to health insurance policies that meet prescribed standards with respect to minimum co-payments and maximum out-of-pocket outlays.

There is evidence that policymakers are beginning to understand the kinds of changes that need to be made to achieve protection against health care costs with less distortion of demand. In 1983, the Reagan administration proposed to introduce very modest co-payments for Medicare and Medicaid patients and to limit the amount that employers could deduct for purchases of health insurance. Unfortunately, neither proposed change was enacted. In 1984, the Treasury again proposed to limit the amount of health insurance that employers could deduct but then dropped this proposal in the president's revised 1985 tax plan. There are however a number of congressional leaders who understand the need to restructure the Medicare-Medicaid benefits and to limit the tax incentives for purchasing excessive private health insurance.

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There is reason to be optimistic that progress will be made in the next decade. The rising costs of health care in general and the increased cost to the government in particular provide a strong incentive to reform. With Medicare-Medicaid outlays projected to exceed $120 billion a year by 1988 and the current tax treatment of health insurance projected to cost more than $40 billion a year in lost revenue, Congress will be looking hard for ways to control health care costs. That search may lead them to a more appropriate redesign of both the Medicare-Medicaid programs and the special tax treatment of health insurance.[1]

Unemployment compensation

The unemployment compensation program was created in the 1930s at the depth of the Depression. The unemployment rate was 25 percent and many men had not seen steady work for a year or more. Individual resources were exhausted and the prospects for finding work were generally bleak.

The structure of the unemployment compensation program has remained essentially unchanged since the 1930s even though the nature of unemployment has changed radically. In recent years, most unemployment has been relatively short with more than half of the spells of unemployment ending in less than six weeks. Nearly half of the unemployed did not become unemployed by losing their previous job but are either young people who are looking for their first job, or people returning to the labor force after a period in which they were neither working nor looking for work, or people who quit their last job in order to look for something better. And more than one-quarter of those who are officially classified as "job losers" are actually on temporary layoff from firms where they have regular jobs and expect to be recalled.

Under current conditions, unemployment compensation raises the rate of unemployment. The most obvious effect of unemployment compensation is to increase the length of time that individuals remain unemployed. Some individuals use the period of compensated unemployment to have a little extra vacation and do odd jobs around the home. Others are induced by unemployment compensation to keep waiting in the hopes that a better job will come along while still others don't bother to take temporary work that would reduce their total unemployment.

[1] For a discussion of these issues, see my "A New Approach to National Health Insurance," *The Public Interest* No. 23 (Spring 1971), pp. 93-105. More generally see my *Hospital Costs and Health Insurance* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

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The current unemployment compensation system also encourages employers to lay workers off for short periods of time instead of finding other ways to smooth production and employment by varying inventories or cutting prices. And the presence of unemployment compensation makes it easier and cheaper for employers to find people willing to take temporary or seasonal jobs that add to the unemployment rate.

Although the absolute level of unemployment benefits is not high, the benefits are large relative to the lost wages that they replace. In most states, unemployment benefits are set at 50 percent of the individual's past wage, with additional benefits for dependents paid to about one-third of the unemployed. Although there is a limit on the weekly benefit, most beneficiaries do receive benefits that equal or exceed half of their past wage.

Until the late 1970s, unemployment benefits were completely free of tax. The high marginal tax rates on wages meant that untaxed unemployment compensation frequently replaced 75 percent or more of lost net income. In a 1973 article in *The Public Interest* I gave the following example:

> Consider a worker in Massachusetts in 1971 with a wife and two children. He earns $500 per month or $6000 per year if he experiences no unemployment. She earns $350 per month or $4200 per year if she experiences no unemployment. If he is unemployed for one month, he loses $500 in gross earnings but less than $100 in net income. How does this occur? A reduction of $500 in annual earnings reduces his federal income tax by $83, his Social Security payroll tax by $26, and his Massachusetts income tax by $25. The total reduction in taxes is $134. Unemployment compensation consists of 50 percent of his wage plus dependents' allowances of $6 per week for each child. Total unemployment compensation is therefore $302. This payment is not part of taxable income. His net income therefore falls from $366 for the month if he is employed (i.e., his $500 gross earnings less $134 in taxes) to the $302 paid in unemployment compensation. The combination of taxes and unemployment compensation imposes an effective marginal tax rate of 87 percent—i.e., the man's net earnings fall by only 13 percent of his gross pay ($64) when he is unemployed for a month.[2]

The balance between protection and distortion was clearly wrong. The protection of the standard of living of the unemployed was so complete that there was little incentive to find work or to avoid unemployment. Substantial statistical evidence has accumulated during the past decade that indicates that individuals who are eligible for higher unemployment benefits relative to their net wage

[2] "The Economics of the New Unemployment," *The Public Interest* No. 33 (Fall 1973), p. 31.

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have longer durations of unemployment, are more likely to become unemployed, and require relatively higher wages as a condition of accepting new employment.

In 1978 the Carter administration proposed and Congress enacted a partial taxation of unemployment compensation for upper-income taxpayers. That taxation has now been extended to full taxation of all benefits for married taxpayers with total income over $18,000 and single taxpayers with incomes over $12,000. Although benefits are still exempt from the Social Security payroll tax (with a combined employer-employee rate of more than 14 percent) and from many state income taxes, subjecting benefits to the federal income tax is a significant step toward reducing distortion and increasing the fairness of the unemployment compensation system. Recent studies have shown that the average duration of unemployment declined for individuals whose benefits became taxable while remaining unchanged among individuals whose incomes kept benefits exempt from taxation.

There is certainly no logic to the current rule that taxes the benefits received by a family with $19,000 of income but not the benefits received by a family with $17,000 of income. Of course, higher income taxpayers should pay more tax on any given amount of benefits and individuals with low enough income should be completely exempt from taxation of any type of income. But that is exactly what would happen if unemployment benefits were treated just like every other type of taxable income.

The Reagan administration, in the tax reform plan released by the Treasury in November 1984, proposed taxing all unemployment compensation. Unfortunately, this proposal was eventually dropped in an effort to make the final plan politically more attractive. It is noteworthy, however, that the leading Democratic alternative, the Bradley-Gephardt bill, would tax all unemployment compensation. It is probably only a matter of time before all benefits are taxable.

The effect of the unemployment compensation system depends not only on the relative level of benefits but also on the way that the program is financed.

The method of financing unemployment benefits can either reduce or exacerbate the distortion of incentives that leads to higher unemployment. Employers now pay more than $25 billion in special payroll taxes to finance the unemployment compensation benefits. Each firm's tax is in principle related to the benefits collected by workers who were laid off by that firm. If this system of experience rating were fully effective, each firm would face the full cost

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of the unemployment benefits that result from its layoffs. A combination of full taxation of benefits to employees and a complete experience rating of firms would eliminate the incentive for excess layoffs and for an excessive amount of temporary and seasonal jobs.

In practice, however, the experience rating system is far from complete. Firms with high layoff rates pay a relatively low maximum rate of unemployment compensation tax that does not increase or decrease as they raise or lower their layoff rates. To make up for the taxes not paid by firms with high layoff rates, firms with very good unemployment experience must pay a relatively high minimum rate of tax. Because this minimum tax cannot be lowered by better unemployment performance, these firms also have no incentive to reduce their layoff rate.

An improvement in the method of experience rating could improve incentives for higher employment without reducing the protection to unemployed workers or to firms. A good start would be to require firms to pay 100 percent of the first month's unemployment compensation.

Some progress has been made in correcting the balance between protection and distortion in the unemployment compensation system. The legislation to tax unemployment compensation that has been enacted is clear evidence that policymakers at last understand that the current system causes unnecessary unemployment. The next steps should take us toward full taxation of benefits and a more complete method of experience rating.

Social Security

I have saved the biggest and most important of the social insurance programs for last. The Social Security program of benefits for retirees and surviving dependents will pay $182 billion in fiscal year 1986. Benefits of $182 billion represent 4.4 percent of the gross national product and one-third of the federal government's outlays for all non-defense programs.

Social Security benefits are projected to rise rapidly in the decades ahead as the population ages and the number of retirees increases. Under current law, benefits thirty-five years from now would be about $2 trillion or 5.6 percent of GNP.

The payroll tax that finances the benefits of retirees and survivors has increased from just 2 percent of the first $3,000 of wages when Social Security began in 1937 to 11.4 percent of wages up to $39,600 in 1985 (including the portion that finances disability insurance, but excluding the Medicare portion). The majority of Ameri-

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can families now pay more in employer-employee payroll taxes for Social Security than they do in personal income taxes. And the Social Security Administration now predicts that that tax will increase during the next twenty-five years to 12.4 percent of wages up to some $56,000 in 1985 dollars.

Although Social Security is widely regarded as the most popular of the major government programs, young workers are frequently critical of Social Security and generally believe that they will not get back in benefits what they have paid in taxes. There is no paradox in this contrast. The economic environment of Social Security has changed dramatically since the program began a half-century ago. As a result, Social Security no longer offers the good deal to young workers that it did to their parents and grandparents.[3]

Social Security was established in the 1930s at a time when millions of Americans had lost their life savings and were without work or the prospect of work. The original Social Security program was designed for those conditions. The program then expanded dramatically during a period when earnings were much lower than they are today and when private pension coverage was rare.

Conditions are now very different. The level of real per capita income has tripled since Social Security began and is likely to double again during the next thirty years. Private pension assets have grown from less than $10 billion in 1945 to more than $1 trillion in 1985. The vast majority of working families now expect to receive substantial private pension benefits when they reach retirement age. And the recent availability of tax-favored Individual Retirement Accounts has been enthusiastically received and has led to substantial deposits of retirement savings. In short, the current and future environment is very different from what it was when the present Social Security program was shaped in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.

The Social Security program was a bonanza for those who got in on the ground floor. Those who retired in the past several decades and those who will retire in the near future will get back in benefits far more than they and their employers paid in taxes. The return that they earned on their tax "contributions" was far greater than they could have gotten by putting those funds in the bank or buying government bonds.

The principal reason why Social Security was such a good deal for the early cohorts of retirees is that the Social Security payroll tax

[3] See my articles, "Facing the Social Security Crisis," *The Public Interest* No. 47 (Spring 1977), pp. 88-100, and "Toward a Reform of Social Security," *The Public Interest* No. 40 (Summer 1975), pp. 75-95.

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rate rose from only 2 percent at the start of the program to more than 10 percent today. Since Social Security is financed on a pay-as-you-go basis, the rise in the payroll tax rate and therefore in total Social Security tax collections made it possible to increase benefits at a very rapid rate.

In the future, Social Security will no longer be a good deal for the vast majority of workers. Young people who have begun work in the past decade or who will enter the workforce in the future will not get nearly as much back for their Social Security contributions as they could get by investing those funds in government bonds or corporate securities. The unfunded pay-as-you-go character of Social Security means that the implicit return of Social Security contributions is far less than on alternative investments.

For example, a 36-year-old worker now has to contribute about $3,000 in employee-employer payroll taxes to earn $9,000 of benefits (in 1985 dollars) at age 66. If instead of paying those $3,000 in taxes the individual invested that same amount in government bonds, the $3,000 would grow to $15,000 by the time he reached age 66. Or to look at that same arithmetic in a slightly different way, he could finance $9,000 of retirement benefits by investing only $1,800 in government bonds instead of the $3,000 that he is now required to pay in Social Security taxes. If Social Security taxes and benefits were lower, the generations born since World War II could have both more consumption while they are still working and more income after they have retired.

The current Social Security program also reduces the living standard of some individuals by forcing them to retire earlier than they would otherwise have preferred. Under current law, a worker who postpones retirement after age 65 effectively throws away a large part of his potential benefits. Although future benefits are raised slightly for those who postpone retirement, the increase is far less than would be actuarially fair. In many cases, working after age 65 would add little or nothing to total income. It is not surprising therefore that the proportion of individuals who retire by age 65 has increased dramatically in spite of improved health and increased longevity.

From a national perspective, the current provision of Social Security benefits reduces aggregate saving by individuals and employer-provided pensions. Since Social Security is financed on a pay-as-you-go basis, there is no accumulated Social Security capital fund to offset the reduction in private capital accumulation. As a result, the nation's capital stock is substantially smaller than it would otherwise be. Workers lose not only because they are forced to accept the

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low rate of return on Social Security contributions but also because the resulting smaller capital stock means lower productivity and therefore lower real wages.

In thinking about the appropriate Social Security program, these adverse effects of Social Security must be balanced against the desirability of protecting those who would otherwise save too little for their own old age either directly or through employer-provided pensions. So again the problem of designing the right social insurance program comes down to balancing protection and distortion: in balancing protection against poverty and hardship in old age against the distortion to saving and retirement decisions.

I believe that the level of Social Security benefits that correctly balances these two considerations is much lower than the level of benefits that prevails today and that will prevail in the future under current law. Benefits that replace as much as 60, 70, or even 80 percent of previous net wages impose too high a cost on those who would otherwise have saved for themselves.

It would be appropriate to reduce benefit replacement ratios for future retirees who are middle- and upper-income wage earners. The lower benefits would permit lower tax rates, leaving workers with extra income that could be invested at higher rates of return. A greater reliance on the Supplementary Security Income program of means-tested benefits for aged individuals would strengthen the protection against poverty in old age without imposing the current large costs in terms of reduced saving and lower returns for those who would otherwise provide adequately for their own old age.

Other useful improvements in the design of Social Security would be a move to a closer matching of taxes and subsequent benefits. The current system is much more favorable for single-earner couples than it is for two-earner families and single individuals. A combination of actuarial fairness for different kinds of families and means-tested benefits that reflect the number of dependents would reduce the distortions in the current system.

Although there is growing recognition of the distortions caused by the current Social Security program, there has been relative little political action to improve the balance between protection and distortion. When the Reagan administration in 1982 proposed reduction of benefits for those who retire before age 65, the Senate expressed its disapproval by unanimous vote. The 1983 bipartisan President's Commission on Social Security Reform agreed that the Social Security program faced a $175 billion gap between receipts and benefits during the remainder of the decade but reduced benefits by only about 2 percent, filling the rest of the gap by advancing

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tax rate increases, bringing employees of nonprofit organizations and new federal employees into the program, and including a portion of the benefits of high income retirees in taxable income. More recently, the attempts to include reductions in the growth of Social Security benefits as part of the deficit reduction actions of 1985 met with overpowering resistance from President Reagan and from both Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives.

But there are some signs of political courage and of a willingness to begin tackling the reform of Social Security. A significant number of senators and congressmen did publicly support proposals to slow the growth of Social Security in order to shrink total government spending. Congress in 1983 did enact legislation that will postpone the retirement age from 65 to 66, although even this modest change will not take effect until the next century. Congress also enacted legislation to eliminate the penalty for delayed retirement by raising the benefits of post-65 retirees at an actuarially fair rate, although the effective date for this improvement is also many years in the future.

The next twenty years

In the past two decades, social insurance benefits have increased at such a dramatic rate that they are now larger than all other federal non-defense spending combined. Economists, policy analysts, and government officials are at last beginning to realize the enormous impact that these programs have on the economy. They are no longer looked upon as benign transfers of funds but are seen as the source of powerful incentives that affect employment, unemployment, capital formation, and health care costs.

With this new perception comes a new concept of the appropriate design of social insurance programs: balancing the protection to those who would otherwise suffer financial hardship against the distortions that result when protection levels are set too high or benefits are badly structured. As economic and social conditions change, the appropriate level and structure of benefits in any social insurance program will also change.

The challenge for the next two decades will be to apply this new understanding to reform our existing social insurance programs. Although the prospective gains from reform outweigh the costs and the prospective beneficiaries outnumber those who would lose, reform inevitably generates stiff political resistance from those who do not want to see benefits reduced. The process of reform will be a critical test of our political system.

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The paranoid style in American politics revisited

DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN

OF continuity and change.

It happens I wrote the opening article in the first issue of *The Public Interest*, and there I am to be found, then as ever since, quoting Nathan Glazer. Congress, Glazer reported, had in 1965 "been painfully and hesitantly trying to deal with two great measures —tax reform and a civil rights bill—and its deliberations on both have been closely covered by the mass media. . . ." Twenty years later Congress is working from much the same agenda, though this time around it is the "Civil Rights *Restoration* Act" being debated, while tax reform, of course, is back with us for what I believe is the ninth time in the intervening two decades. For my part, twenty years ago I was welcoming developments in the social sciences and the professions which raised the prospect that "the more primitive social issues of American politics are at last to be resolved" so that "we may now turn to issues more demanding of human ingenuity than that of how to put an end to poverty in the richest nation in the world." Twenty years later I have just delivered the Godkin Lectures at Harvard wherein it is proposed that, having all but eliminated poverty among the aged, we surely could do something about its extraordinary relative rise among children. The fact that

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certain difficulties persist, some indeed worsening, makes a claim on our sensibilities.

Of change? We know more and expect less. The social optimism of the 1960s has quite vanished, as have the political majorities which reflected it and in turn structured and enlivened it. I can write today with greater knowledge of the problems of, say, family structure than twenty years ago. But where once I could confidently foresee something like a large national response by the end of that decade, today I can't imagine any serious legislation occurring by the end of the century.

Now to be sure one of the central arguments of successive issues of *The Public Interest*, which began appearing in that probably over-optimistic period twenty years ago, was that there were things government can't do, or can't do well, or indeed shouldn't attempt at all. Still, I don't know that we ever foresaw, or would have approved, a time such as the present when almost any discussion of social issues in Washington is likely to be confronted with the (somewhat involute) theorem that problems arise from efforts to deal with them. I hold with Daniel Yankelovich that the electorate is on a "mental holiday, which will end abruptly and brutally." Let that be. The United States is enjoying a moment of social peace; we deserve it and ought indeed to enjoy it.

What troubles me is a contrary disposition I sense growing in Washington which is anything but relaxed and trusting. It is rather hugely distrustful and just as greatly distressed. It is a movement of the Right very much like those Richard Hofstadter described twenty years ago in his book, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*.

Hofstadter examined those "uncommonly angry minds" who have been present and busy on the fringes of American politics throughout our history and have occasionally made their way to the center of attention and influence. He used the term "paranoid style," he explained, not in a clinical way, but in a descriptive sense, as an art historian might speak of "the baroque or the mannerist style."[1] The distinguishing feature of the paranoid style is the sense of persecution, which expresses itself in elaborate theories of conspiracy. While the clinical paranoid lives in a world he is convinced is out to

[1] Blackiston's *Gould Medical Dictionary* (4th edition, 1979) defines paranoia as "A rare form of paranoid psychosis characterized by the slow development of a complex internally logical system of persecutory or grandiose delusions, which is often based on the misinterpretation of an actual event. The delusional thinking is isolated from much of the normal stream of consciousness, the remaining personality being intact despite a chronic course. The patient generally considers himself superior, possessing unique or even divine gifts."

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get him, the paranoid in politics, wrote Hofstadter, sees the conspiracy

> directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others. . . . His sense that his political passions are unselfish and patriotic, in fact, goes far to intensify his feeling of righteousness and his moral indignation.

These people "tend to be overheated, oversuspicious, over-aggressive, grandiose, and apocalyptic in expression" and yet socialized, functioning individuals.

> [T]he idea of the paranoid style would have little . . . value if it were applied only to people with profoundly disturbed minds. It is the use of paranoid modes of expression by more or less normal people that makes the phenomenon significant. . . . What interests me here is the possibility of using political rhetoric to get at political pathology. One of the most impressive facts about the paranoid style, in this connection, is that it represents an old and recurring mode of expression in our public life which has frequently been linked with movements of suspicious discontent and whose content remains much the same even when it is adopted by men of distinctly different purposes. Our experience suggests too that, while it comes in waves of different intensity it appears to be all but ineradicable.

The paranoid style in politics is not confined to the United States. Hofstadter explained that he chose to confine his analysis to this country simply because, as an Americanist, it was for him a choice of convenience. ("Notions about an all-embracing conspiracy on the part of Jesuits or Freemasons, international capitalists, international Jews, or Communists are familiar phenomena in many countries throughout history.")

Now clearly Hofstadter's purpose in writing was beyond that simply of the historian. He hadn't liked the conspiracy theories of the 1950s—thought they had damaged institutions—and needed analysis against the day they would come again. Of which more later.

Beginnings of the new class struggle

May I go back for a moment to that inaugural issue of *The Public Interest*? Among the contributions was a pair of essays, the first in a series, on the subject: "Why Are the Poor Still with Us?" Glazer contributed an essay called "Paradoxes of American Poverty." It began:

> Presidents, socialists, reformers and academicians have set the prevailing contemporary tone in discussing poverty in America—shock and outrage that it should exist, followed by a direct and earnest passion that we should do everything necessary to wipe it out. And for the most part the mass media and the people have followed these guides.

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Go over that just once more: "Presidents, socialists, reformers and academicians" had set a "prevailing contemporary tone" of discussion on a major domestic issue which the "mass media" had adopted. This was just fifteen years after Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's accusation, at Wheeling, West Virginia, that the United States government was infested with "Communist agents" launched him on his rise to prominence. The 1950s were a decade in which intellectuals were rather on the defensive, and not least those who had been caught up as anti-Communists in the *Kulturkampf* of the 1930s and 1940s. Distinctions of the largest consequence seemed hazy indeed from the distance of Appleton, Wisconsin. From the perspective of New York, to be on the Left was a kind of fate, and not always a friendly one. A favorite parable of the time was that of the Irish cop clubbing away at some demonstrator in Union Square. "But officer," pleads the hapless acolyte of Norman Thomas or Max Schactman, "I'm an anti-Communist." Whack, wump, thump comes the response: "I don't care what kind of Communist you are."

Actual experience was not all that awful. Seymour Martin Lipset would observe that among academics those who supported McCarthy had perhaps a harder time during the period in their own communities than those who were harassed. Even so the larger social threat was real and was felt.

What a release then when the decade passed. The great accuser was in turn accused and destroyed, and a new president came to office celebrating the higher callings of the mind—summoning, or so it was said, philosophers to his court. Herewith Irving Kristol on "The Troublesome Intellectuals," an introductory comment to our second issue:

> The contentiousness and/or "pushiness" so evident among American intellectuals today is the price we are paying for so belatedly incorporating the intellectual into American public life. It is a price we ought to pay gladly, because it represents a singular and enviable opportunity.
>
> . . . [T]he involvement of intellectuals in American politics—this coming in from the cold after a century and a half's exclusion—will itself be a most useful educational experience. . . . American politics has an ingrained philistinism and anti-intellectualism that has been the cause of infinite mischief.

The Public Interest, itself an expression of the intellectual now involved in public life, would also seek to moderate some of that contentiousness. Reason, prudence, competence were to be our themes. In an early discussion about a title for the journal I had suggested Lyndon B. Johnson's then-favorite term "consensus." Kristol actually paused a moment: *Consensus: A Journal of The Public Interest*.

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Hmmm. That seemed, well, reasonable, prudent, descriptive of the age. In that second issue Kristol observed "there does seem to be something in the American air which makes all radicalism, whether of the right or left, an exercise in nostalgia." Such hopes were not to last the year. Even as Kristol wrote, the Vietnam war had begun in earnest: "liberalism's war" as William Pfaff would write. Johnson began backing away from social policy; urban riots were becoming endemic. By issue Number 4, which appeared in the fall of 1966, Kristol would address the rise of both the "New Left" and, now, the "New Right." A friend from California, an active Democrat, had visited him, troubled that

> the "New Left," using Berkeley as a base, was . . . trying to move into the Democratic party in a significant way. Then there was the victory of Ronald Reagan in the Republican primary, and the discovery of the pollsters that he seemed to have an excellent chance against Governor Brown in November. This was a particular shock since the Democrats had always felt . . . that Reagan, as an "extremist" would have the least chance of election. . . . My friend didn't understand what precisely was bugging the militants of this New Left or why the citizens of California should show so keen an interest in Ronald Reagan. Neither this New Left nor this New Right seemed to have anything like a coherent program.

Kristol espied instantly, however, that a new class struggle was emerging—over values rather than programs. The New Left had the familiar complaints of alienation; they felt dispossessed of a rightful inheritance. "The New Right, oddly enough, makes its complaint in not dissimilar terms: the self-reliant individual is losing control over his own destiny, and over the destiny of his children too." Neither could get a "friendly grip" on American life. It was easy "to poke gentle or cruel fun" at either, but there was something more.

As we were to learn, there was a crisis of authority brewing. This is a danger to any political system, but perhaps especially that of democracy for the very reason that *political* remedies seem in order, and possible. Kristol saw this and warned that "*the one worst way to cope with this crisis in values is through organized political-ideological action*" (his italics).

For the *Public Interest* writers of this period Kristol's rule never to politicize an issue of culture was not an abstraction; it was an experience. Without exception that I know, the founders of *The Public Interest*, and the writers of the early issues, were Democrats. (Kristol: "I approve, on the whole, the various programs for a Great Society . . .") But for most this attachment had come late to their intellectual lives. (Most? Many? How to be precise? I cannot, but

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hope even so to be understood.) For them the real struggle, worldwide, had been with the totalitarian left, and the culture broadly defined was characteristically the setting, a struggle that seemed finally to have come to an end with the Stalinists discredited and defeated in Western culture, after which political defeat would inevitably follow.

When the New Left went ahead anyway—they had been warned!—and commenced as they could to politicize the universities and invade the Democratic Party, the response of this cadre of American intellectuals was simply to move on. Their attachment to any of the bourgeois parties, as you might say, was tactical at most. To the extent there was anything visceral in this deeply civil and civilized circle it was contempt that could rise to quiet rage at the lying and conniving and manipulating of the old totalitarian left—which now reappeared in the mouths of babes. No first-time-tragedy/second-time-farce for this group of battle-hardened dialecticians. The totalitarian tactic was outrageous in whatever form. And so the group began to make distinctions between its general view and that of the left-liberalism that was becoming ascendant in previously friendly if slightly distant circles, especially those of the more politically and ideologically active. In turn the group came to be seen as distinctive. The *Public Interest* circle, readers and writers, came to be something distinct in American political and intellectual terms.

It was arguably farcical, however, when the treason trials began. The *Public Interest* tendency was formally denounced as, oh well, a deviationist tendency objectively allied with the class enemy. This occured in the wrathful pages of *Dissent*, "a journal devoted to radical ideas and the values of socialism and democracy." In the autumn of 1973, Michael Harrington, the very socialist Glazer had placed in such agreeable company in issue Number 1, declared that Kristol and Bell and he and I and suchlike were not liberals at all, but—"neoconservatives"!

Many in the group were rather taken with the term, and have gone where it pointed. So began one of the great migrations in twentieth-century American politics. The Republican Party and the conservative cause acquired an intellectual class. In fairness, it should be said *another* such class, for there were genuinely able conservative intellectuals already at work, and indeed it was these who first recognized and welcomed the newcomers. By 1980, Republicans "had become, or were becoming, the party of ideas."[2] Democrats

[2] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, introduction to *No Margin for Error* by Howard Baker (New York: Times Books, 1980), p. vii.

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were left seemingly the party of government and, as Tocqueville might have forecast, destined for a good spell out of office (". . . [I]t was by promising to weaken it that one won the right to control it.")

Although much of the foregoing will seem anecdotal, and even self-absorbed, I think it defensible as a sketch of certain events of that time and as a prelude to some events now appearing. *The Public Interest* first appeared in a brief "era" of good will. Republican moderates had put down a "paranoid" insurgency on their right. Then came an insurgency of the Democratic left. And now the New Left is past and it appears that it is now the turn of the New Right, recall that this was Kristol's term nineteen years ago, to show its destructive and perhaps self-destructive tendencies. It would seem once again it is the turn of conservatives to deal with an insurgency in the peculiarly paranoid style of the Right.

Hofstadter's paradigm

Hofstadter began his essay with an account of imagined conspiracies that preoccupied eighteenth-century divines. He then turned to the anti-Masonic movement that began in New York in the 1820s and in time "affected many parts of the Northern United States and . . . showed the same fear that opportunities for the common man would be closed, the same passionate dislike of aristocratic institutions, that one finds in the Jacksonian crusade against the Bank of the United States."

(Let me interrupt here to note one difficulty. The paranoid style shares a distrust of elites with popular movements that are perfectly normal in a democracy such as ours where elites can be hugely out of touch with other parts of the political community. It is a huge mistake to confuse the two.)

"As a secret society," Hofstadter continues, "Masonry was considered to be a standard conspiracy against republican government," peculiarly liable to treason, as in Aaron Burr's adventures. Freemasons were thought to maintain a vast network of relations constituting a secret government which controlled the real government. (In my own youth, in New York City, I was assured of this: These things persist.) They drank wine from human skulls in their infamous lodges. They took terrible violent oaths of secrecy. As the establishment was infested with Masons—sheriffs, judges, juries would all be in cahoots with Masonic criminals—Masonic malfeasance would go unpunished, even unreported. The press, too, was infiltrated by Masons, the proof of which was that there was precious little reporting of the Masons' efforts to seize control of the

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country and impoverish "the hardy common citizens of the type the anti-Masonic movement liked to claim for its own."

An anti-Catholic movement followed, obsessed with Jesuit conspiracies, and stimulated by two books which appeared in 1835. *Awful Disclosures*, by Maria Monk, was the most widely read popular book in America until the appearance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It would be rated soft porn today: mostly an account of compliant nuns succumbing to the lust of libertine priests. Resulting children were baptized, then strangled.

A more systematic treatment of the Catholic conspiracy can be found in *Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States* by Samuel F. B. Morse, then a professor at New York University, and inventor of the telegraph and the Morse Code. "A conspiracy exists," Morse proclaimed, and "its plans are already in operation . . . we are attacked in a vulnerable quarter which cannot be defenced by our ships, our forts, or our armies." The war was between Roman Catholicism on the one hand, and political and religious liberty on the other. Jesuits were prowling everywhere, cassocks stuffed with cash, carrying out the conspiracy. "Can we not perceive all about us the evidence of his presence? . . . We must awake or we are lost." The instrument of the enemy in this case, interestingly, was Prince von Metternich's government: "*Austria is now acting in this country.*"

In Hofstadter's view this cry of impending doom is typical of the paranoid's style: "He is always manning the barricades of civilization. He constantly lives at a turning point: it is now or never in organizing resistance to the conspiracy. Time is forever just running out." Again, the messianic mission: "As a member of the avant-garde who is capable of perceiving the conspiracy before it is fully obvious to an as yet unaroused public, the paranoid is a militant leader."

Commencing with the New Deal and its aftermath, Hofstadter has difficulty keeping count, such did the paranoid style flourish. The founder of the John Birch Society discovered that "Communist influences are now in almost complete control of our Federal Government." Russian troops were massing on the Mexican border. John Foster Dulles was a Communist agent. The venerable Arthur F. Burns was in on it all (and presumably still is). Milton S. Eisenhower was the real boss, President Eisenhower a mere "dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy . . ." Hofstadter then abstracts the basic elements in the paranoid style.

> The central image is that of a vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic and yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy

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> a way of life. . . . The distinguishing thing . . . is not that its exponents see conspiracies or plots here and there, but that they regard a "vast" or "gigantic" conspiracy as *the motive force* in historical events. History *is* a conspiracy.

He writes that the basic elements of the contemporary post-World War II approach can be reduced to three.

> First . . . the . . . conspiracy . . . to undermine free capitalism, to bring the economy under the control of the federal government and pave the way for socialism or communism.
>
> The second contention is that top government officialdom has been so infiltrated by Communists that American policy . . . has been dominated by sinister men who were shrewdly and consistently selling out American national interests.
>
> The final contention is that the country is infused with a network of Communist agents, just as in the old days it was infiltrated by Jesuit agents, so that the whole apparatus of education, religion, the press, and the mass media are engaged in a common effort to paralyze the resistance of loyal Americans.

There *are* patterns in cultures, including political cultures, and when historians detect them we are better able to recognize and deal with them when they recur.

If I am not mistaken, such a recurrence has been taking place in Washington in recent years, and is taking root in the nation at large. It has links to the old Bircher-McCarthyite notion of betrayal to the Communists by an elite, the Masonic strain if you like, and also exhibits a belated awareness of the struggle with Stalinists, many of them "undercover," in the New York cultural milieu of the 1930s through the 1950s, the Jesuit strain, you might say. What is new is the locus of the conspiracy: the television networks.

The conspiracy revealed

Hofstadter did not attempt to account for the rise of the various delusions he described: They came when they did. Not being a historian, I am not bound by professional canons, and will risk a tentative explanation. This new conspiracy theory began to take hold midway through Reagan's first term. To all appearances an assertive and convinced group of conservatives had attained to great influence in the capital. They had won federal elections, been appointed to high office. Yet they did not seem to feel that their ideas and ideals were prevailing. To the contrary, they began to suggest that something was thwarting their revolution. Somehow the President himself was being misled; acting at the behest of unknown others. He was not being allowed to be himself. The cry "Let Reagan be Reagan" was heard in the Cabinet itself.

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I have served in the Subcabinet or Cabinet of four successive American presidents, including the Cabinet of the two previous Republican presidents. I am aware that presidents play many roles and that some do dissemble sometimes. But never have I seen a president more himself in his public appearances, more at ease with himself and comfortable with his views than Ronald Reagan. *Who* then was not letting him be himself?

On the fringe of the Reagan movement, in itself an entirely normal political movement that first triumphed within an established party, and then won national office, a conspiracy theory developed. I *think* it came about because the Reagan revolution didn't change all that much; or didn't do so in expected ways. Such is life, and those around the President made their peace with the fact thereof, but again, on the fringes there was a denial of reality and a conspiracy theory sprang up.

The unified theory, if I may use the term, is spelled out in a four-page, single-spaced letter dated April 22, 1985, which a constituent of mine received from Mr. John T. Dolan of the National Conservative Foundation of Alexandria, Virginia. In the early 1980s Dolan was briefly a man to be reckoned with in Washington. As head of the National Conservative Political Action Committee he took credit for the defeat of five liberal Democrats in the 1980 senatorial elections in which Republicans won their first majority there in a quarter century. Dolan affected the highbinder style of someone who cared not the least about respectability, even legality. In the spring of 1980 he told the *New York Times*:

> There's no question about it—we are a negative organization that wants to get rid of five bad votes in the Senate. . . .
>
> We're interested in ideology. We're going to beat these five and send a shiver down the spine of every other liberal Senator and Congressman.

He could not repeat his performance in 1982 or 1984 and thereafter gave up on electoral politics, seemingly convinced that something had thwarted him. I offer him as an example.

Dolan's letter proceeds as might the product of a creative writing course. This week's assignment: Compose a political manifesto in the paranoid style describing a vast conspiracy against republican government in the United States. Start with a central image. Proceed to describe the three basic elements of the conspiracy, as outlined by Hofstadter. The locus of the conspiracy must be of sufficient proximity and influence to pose a credible, imminent threat to society. Credit will be given for novel suggestions.

Mr. Dolan reported to my constituent friend (who had never

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before heard from him or of him), that a private meeting had been arranged

> between you and two Members of the President's Cabinet on May 21, 1985; *Secretary of the Interior Donald P. Hodel* at 11:00 A.M. and *Secretary of Education William J. Bennett* at 2:00 P.M., in their respective offices in Washington, D.C. These special briefings have been arranged for members of the CONSERVATIVE FORUM . . .

He begins with the conspiracy.

> The American people have twice now elected Ronald Reagan to the White House by landslide proportions based upon his conservative platform. Yet at every turn, his—our—agenda is stymied by people who simply disregard the will of the American public and continue to proceed with their own liberal programs.

Next, the three basic elements.

> Machinery.
>
> The liberal machine in Washington, D.C. is powerful and entrenched. The federal bureaucracy consists of increasingly powerful career "civil servants" who are totally out of touch with grassroots America. They have consistently wasted untold billions of dollars of taxpayers' money every year on irresponsible federal programs that have accomplished absolutely nothing. Worse still, theirs is a socialist agenda predicated on their "right" to spend our money at will on totally unproductive programs.
>
> Treason at the Top.
>
> The bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. are strongly supported by the liberals in Congress who share the same philosophy. These legislators are clearly out of step with their constituencies, and continue to fund the welfare state that the American public has so soundly rejected.
>
> The Hidden Network.
>
> The third, and possibly most irresponsible liberal group fighting the conservative movement is the liberal media. You will never hear the media report on the untold billions of dollars that liberals waste every year. Instead, the liberal media repeatedly blasts the Reagan Administration for "massive" budget cuts while maintaining that conservatives are anti-poor, racist, etc. You and I know this is simply untrue and is the height of hypocrisy.

Dolan concludes by soliciting money to carry out a grassroots campaign to expose the conspiracy, a small enough sum for so large a mission. (And, in the American style, this would be a "corporate tax-deductible contribution.")

The "private meetings" with the Secretaries of Education and Interior would be only the start:

> Our next scheduled meeting is with *Health and Human Services Secretary Margaret Heckler* on June 11, 1985.

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> *Treasury Secretary James Baker, Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldrige and Energy Secretary John Herrington* have also agreed to hold meetings this fall. I am also arranging a series of private meetings with top White House officials and conservative Congressional leaders who will update you on the President's legislative agenda. Attendance at these meetings *will be limited to 25 people each* in order to allow for the maximum exchange of personal views.

Finally, the Mission.

> The . . . goal of the CONSERVATIVE FORUM is to fight the distortions of the liberal media in their efforts to discredit the conservative movement. Through the National Conservative Foundation, we are already assembling the most sophisticated research on the liberal press available in America today. Armed with this research, we are producing, and will be airing nationally, a battery of commercials demonstrating the incredible bias of our national media. We will be specifically targeting the Washington Post, The New York Times, ABC, NBC, and CBS to demonstrate conclusively their efforts to discredit President Reagan and our conservative issue agenda.

I have lingered with this text not because of its great consequence but because of the clarity and completeness of the explication. Here is the paranoid style in American politics fully on display, with the new locus of conspiracy: television news.

Attack on the networks

Turn now to the pronouncements of the organization Accuracy In Media (AIM), Inc., a Washington-based corporation which publishes AIM REPORT, edited by Reed Irvine. Doubtless Mr. Irvine has many and diverse thoughts on his subject, but a reader of AIM REPORT could easily conclude that they come down to one charge: The television networks based in New York are witting or unwitting dupes of Communism and potent instruments for the diffusion of Soviet propaganda.

Let us sample three REPORTS: March, April, and May of 1984. The March 1984 REPORT had as its headline: "NBC Airs Soviet Propaganda." The broadcast in question was a two-part series, "The Church of the Russians" (which is to say the Russian Orthodox Church) "which shocked and outraged those familiar with the true state of religion in the Soviet Union today." NBC had failed to report that "the Orthodox seminaries in the Soviet Union are controlled by the KGB." Young people in the Soviet Union "are sophisticated enough to know that the Orthodox priests are fakes."

Hofstadter noted that there is commonly, perhaps uniformly, a touch of truth on which the paranoid style builds its fantasies. (The Masons *were* a secret society, and their members were of the elite,

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and frequently influential. The Jesuits surely *hoped* for the conversion of the United States to Catholicism.) I don't in the least doubt that there are KGB agents within the Orthodox Church in the Soviet Union; it previously had its share of Czarist agents. The essence of the paranoid style is to extrapolate grotesquely from that grain of the truth.

Erving Goffman used to argue that the world of the paranoid (I believe he meant clinical paranoid, but his case will serve for our political analogue) was never really "upside down" from that in which the rest of us toil, but merely ever so slightly tilted. Inasmuch as conspiracies have the greatest chance of success when nothing unusual seems to be going on, to the paranoid mind the outward appearance of normality is the key clue to the fact that a conspiracy is indeed afoot. What more commonplace nineteenth-century scene than smoke issuing from chimney pots? How better, then, for enemies to send signals unsuspected by the uninitiated? Only those aware of, or in on, the conspiracy would know. What seems normal can in fact be most sinister to the paranoid.

Thus, the ABC network ran a movie in 1983 about the aftermath of a nuclear attack on the United States; something that could happen, and which a lot of people think about a great deal. Accuracy In Media got the real message, and took action. The April 1984 AIM REPORT headline is: "We Win!" It reports that ABC shareholders would get a chance to vote on an Accuracy In Media resolution, which read as follows:

> Whereas, the Soviet Union spends billions of dollars each year on its worldwide propaganda and disinformation campaign with the goal of manipulating the mass media of the United States and other countries of the free world, and,
>
> Whereas, ABC on November 20, 1983, televised a movie, "The Day After," which had been produced and promoted by ABC at an estimated cost of around $8 million and which in the view of some experts in propaganda analysis meshed with the Soviet anti-nuclear campaign whose primary goal was to bar the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles in NATO countries,
>
> We ask the board of directors to take note of the danger that ABC's facilities may be used to disseminate Soviet propaganda and to undertake an investigation to determine whether or not this has been done in the past and to devise measures to insure that it is not done in the future.

And so to May, 1984. The AIM headline: "CBS: 'Arrogant and Irresponsible.'" AIM is a shareholder in CBS and at the corporation's annual meeting of that year asked that CBS consider "what measures might be taken to guard against the facilities of CBS being used to disseminate Soviet-bloc propaganda." In a statement on the

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occasion Mr. Irvine addressed the subject of "the vulnerability of our media to penetration by Soviet propaganda," commending a book on the subject by Professors Roy Dodson and Richard Schultz, *Dezinformatsia*. (Again, the paranoid touches base, briefly, with reality. Dodson and Shultz had written a serious and interesting analysis of Soviet propaganda techniques. However, their book does not even remotely suggest that American television has been used to disseminate Soviet propaganda.) Undeterred, AIM reported:

> We saw a . . . serious case in 1981, when CBS aired its five-part series, "The Defense of the United States." Walter Cronkite was shown interviewing a General Milshtein in Moscow, who was provided with an opportunity to voice false statements about the missile build-up, statements which certainly were Soviet disinformation, but which were never disputed on the program. A Soviet defector, Igor Glagolev, said he knew General Milshtein well and that Milshtein didn't believe anything that he had said in his interview with Mr. Cronkite.

In the course of the following twelve months there occurred numerous military anniversaries, principally associated with the Nazi surrender in Europe, but also marking the North Vietnamese triumph in southeast Asia in 1975. Television covered both. Where the first subject lent itself to archival reporting of an American success and nostalgic returns to old battlefields by long-reconciled combatants, the tenth anniversary of the fall of Saigon, a messier story all around, could be reported, wisely or not, in live interviews with many more of the actual participants—many, predictably, still active in fighting political battles related to the war's conduct. The networks did a lot of this. And so to the May 1985 AIM REPORT: "Homage to Hanoi." They begin with a 1975 passage by James Reston speculating that "*Maybe the historians will agree that the reporters and the cameras were decisive in the end. They brought the issue of the war to the people . . . and forced the withdrawal of American power from Vietnam* [italics in the original]." Henry Kissinger is cited in a less speculative mood. Of a Ted Koppel interview with Le Duc Tho, he observes: "I think what we saw is a defeat which we inflicted on ourselves. And it is quite significant that Le Duc Tho thanked his American supporters at the end of his remarks . . ." None of the networks escaped, but NBC captured AIM's "despicable coverage award" for all 'round performance.

In June, 1985 the Public Broadcasting Service announced that it would present (which is to say make available to PBS stations) a fifty-seven-minute rebuttal to a thirteen-part series that PBS had commissioned on the Vietnam war and presented in 1983. The rebuttal film produced by AIM was entitled "Television's Vietnam: The

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Real Story" and was partly financed by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Fox Butterfield of the *New York Times* describes the feature as contending that "America's purpose in Vietnam was 'noble' but that it was misled by 'disinformation' from the press and television, which helped lose the war."

As Tom Shales of the *Washington Post* noted the week of the broadcast:

> Footage of Jane Fonda prancing and grinning merrily through North Vietnam is justifiably inserted to embarrass the white-wine liberals who made protesting against the war into sanctimonious exhibitionism at the time.
>
> But none of this strikes at any of the original documentary's integrity or good intentions. It couldn't have been perfect, and wasn't, but AIM fails to support its charges that it was "flawed by serious errors and distortions," and that it turned the sorrowful story of the war into a "melodrama of heroes and villains."
>
> The single most specious charge is made against the press in general, not the PBS show. AIM blames the media for the fact the war was lost. After giving examples of allegedly excessive media focus on war protest, [narrator Charlton] Heston says, "This kind of distorted coverage had a cumulative effect on Congress. The results on the battlefield were disastrous." Even crackpots must wince a bit at this kind of assertion.

From conspiracy to intimidation

What does it matter what the crackpots believe? It matters to the extent that others come to believe *them*. This particular viewpoint, just now, is close to power in Washington. Unless Mr. Dolan completely misrepresents himself, he is able to summon at least six members of the President's Cabinet to meetings with his Conservative Forum to chat about the liberal conspiracy. Who can say how widely Dolan and his kind are believed? But they are not rejected. To the contrary, they are encouraged. Without overstating either the fragility of such large corporate enterprises as network news programs or the credibility of Mr. Dolan, we begin to approach officially sanctioned political pressure on those who report the news. This is not, in my view, something we should wish for our country.

First, as to the facts: They are wrong. I have been more or less continuously involved with intelligence matters for the past dozen years, and have been especially interested in this question of Soviet disinformation. Heaven knows the Soviets try. (One caveat: Not everything that comes out of Moscow is propaganda. Much of what they say they believe. How much is an absolutely key question for the intelligence analyst. Do they *believe* that? Or do they know it is not true but simply want others to believe it?) In this time I have

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never encountered a successful Soviet penetration of the American television networks. Which is to say I have never seen reported as true an untruth which originated with the Soviet propaganda machinery.[3] There may have been such, but all I can attest is that none has ever come to my attention. (If any came to the attention of senior American intelligence officers during the period 1977-1984, when I served as a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, it would have been their duty to report it. I cannot recall any such.)

Certainly the Soviets do succeed in spreading lies. When terrorists seized the Grand Mosque at Mecca in November 1979, someone circulated word in Islamabad that the U.S. was responsible for this assault on Islam's holiest shrine—which inspired a Pakistani mob to go burn down an American embassy building. (So it is explained.) But no American media reported that the U.S. was responsible for the incident at Mecca, nor has any credible media outlet anywhere else. Most efforts by the Soviets at disinformation are pretty clumsy and, even in countries where spreading rumors of American conspiracy is a popular pastime, the Soviets don't enjoy much success. Newsmen don't fall for it. In October 1984, aboard the Secretary of State's plane heading to India for the funeral of Indira Gandhi, we learned that the Soviets had put it out that somehow the United States was involved in the assassination. The next morning the *Patriot*, the Indian Communist daily, reported the charge in blazing headlines. But the rest of the Indian press ignored it. That evening, in response to a blunt inquiry from the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister of the U.S.S.R stated that this was not his government's view. End of that media manipulation campaign.

Then there is the celebrated campaign following the death of Leonid Brezhnev in 1982, to portray Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov as a closet swinger. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that he "likes Glenn Miller records, good scotch whiskey, Oriental rugs, and American books." Other papers picked up miscellaneous tidbits about the Americana in Andropov's life and this led a handful of commentators to make hopeful noises about Soviet-American relations during the Andropov reign. But if any harm was done it is difficult to spot. Reviewing the episode in *The New Republic*, Edward Jay Epstein concluded it was less disinformation than the familiar desire of the press to add some "color" to a new face in the absence of any reliable sources of information.

[3] Accuracy In Media has recently spun off Accuracy In Academia, which has learned that 10,000 Marxist professors are "brainwashing" America's youth through "misinformation and disinformation" in classrooms (*Washington Post*, August 4, 1985).

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There are of course biases in journalism: Reporters are burdened with the same sorts of preconceptions any of us bring to most any subject. Sometimes they will get the story wrong, or miss the point. Even so, the advent and development of television news in the space of, what? twenty years, say 1950 to 1970, was an event not different in its impact from the invention of printing. What was so very special in the United States were the people involved. Anyone who has known that first generation of television journalists will gladly concede one point and fiercely defend another. They were political liberals; their successors, in the main, still are. They had begun life as newspapermen when, typically, reporters were Democrats and publishers were Republicans—a class distinction if you like. But their avocation was *straight news*, and part of the crescendo of creativity that broke forth in the 1950s was nothing more or less than the energies released by the realization that they were free to put out their own newspaper. Think: no editorials! In this regard the federal government was on their side. The Fairness Doctrine of the Federal Communications Commission required that a reasonable amount of broadcast time be devoted to controversial issues, *and* that a reasonable opportunity be afforded opposing viewpoints. A general rule held that time be devoted to public interest topics, of which news reporting was clearly the mainstay.

Yet they were never quite so free as they felt. First, the networks themselves were in no way free of the federal government. Witness the Fairness Doctrine itself. An agreeable law? Well, yes. But no such law could be passed regarding the press. I believe it is settled that television news is protected by the First Amendment. It is a somewhat diminished protection, perhaps, in that stations are licensed and subject to public interest requirements. Thus the Federal Communications Commission can ordain something called a "family hour" during which only wholesome subjects may be broadcast while the children are still up. The plain fact is that the public owns the airways; owners own the press.

What the public owns, the government controls. In July 1985, the newly appointed attorney general of the Reagan administration, fresh from the White House staff, was speculating as to whether "rules" needed to be established for television coverage of events such as the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 the previous month. By any measure, save the murder of one naval person before any television was involved, the hostages had been returned and the administration was entitled to considerable credit. Yet it rather encouraged a general judgment that the networks had somehow behaved badly.

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Nothing new. Last year the CIA got mad at ABC for what it described as "deliberate news distortion" and tried unsuccessfully to get the FCC to strip the network of its broadcast licenses. Fred W. Friendly has recounted the efforts of the Kennedy administration to harass fundamentalist religious broadcasts that were politically hostile. What might be new is a generally censorious tone, even when the news has been "good." Reminding the nominal owners who the real owners are.

Television stations are commercial enterprises which earn money by selling programs to advertisers priced according to the size of audiences. Newspapers do the same, but newspapers mostly sell their audiences news. Television mostly sells entertainment: If you like, it puts on plays, interspersed with what the Greeks would call games, interrupted at intervals with news. The managements of the three New York networks have been generous with new budgets and meticulous about not interfering. I first appeared on the *Today Show* in 1963 and have been somewhat evident on all three networks for more than two decades now. I have never heard so much as a whisper of interference by management. (In the interest, as they say, of full disclosure, I should say I was briefly a consultant to NBC in the late 1960s. Working with Fred Freed, one of the early masters of television documentary, I got a close look at one network. There was some grumbling about budgets: but of political interference, not a word.)

There are some 1,250 television broadcast stations. Of these, the three major networks own a couple dozen. The rest are either independent, or are affiliates of one or another network. In rough terms about half the stations are affiliated, and these in about equal proportions among NBC, CBS, and ABC. If the networks are primarily in the entertainment business, so are the affiliates. But they are much closer to their audience, and understandably and properly sensitive to public opinion about the material they present. Should a general mood develop that holds that network news is somehow tainted, manipulative, not to be trusted—well, the easiest thing is simply not to buy it. If it ceases to be bought either it will cease to be offered for sale, or it will be recast. That is the law of midtown Manhattan.

I would be at pains to make clear that in speaking of the paranoid style I do not refer to the merely more excitable sectors of the conservative right or the liberal left (as these designations are commonly employed). Thus my colleague Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina is involved with an enterprise, "Fairness in Media," which

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professes great alarm at the nightly appearances of Dan Rather on CBS television and urges citizens to "buy and hold CBS stock" so that they can "later vote that stock to end CBS liberal bias." For every such alert that comes in the mail telling a senator that the liberals have seized Radio City (NBC), "Black Rock" (CBS), or the former Sheffield milk bottling plant on West 57th Street (which serves as the somewhat down-scale studios of CBS), there is an opposite from People for the American Way, or what have you, warning that it is Jesse Helms or the Reverend Falwell who is about to seize power. This is called direct mail. It raises money. The tone is frequently apocalyptic, but the causes on both left and right are just as frequently serious and sober-minded and certifiably sane.

A matter of duty

To illustrate the difference between political rhetoric and political paranoia, pause a moment with Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. and his "National Democratic Policy Committee" (formerly the "U.S. Labor Party"). Theirs has been a larger and more active presence on the *left* in recent American politics than is perhaps generally known. Liberal and moderate Democrats, with an exception I will come to, have been pretty much on their own in fighting off and blocking this influence.

Although LaRouche did not begin organizing his network until four years after Hofstadter's book appeared, there could hardly be a more exact model of the paranoid style. LaRouche seems to have begun as a member of the Socialist Workers Party, a Trotskyite group. He set out on his own in 1969, when he established a left-wing National Caucus of Labor Committees at Columbia University. Since then he has established a consortium of like-minded believers in what must surely be one of the most all-encompassing, apocalyptic conspiracy theories yet devised. The conspiracy includes as co-conspirators the KGB, the CIA, the British royal family, the Rockefellers, the media, the Mafia, the Ku Klux Klan, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, "the Zionist lobby," and all manner of powerful institutions working in league to bring poverty and nuclear holocaust to America, mainly by promoting the illicit narcotics traffic. All of this is somehow traced to the Guelph tendency of the Italian Middle Ages. It abounds in codewords—for "British" read "Jewish." (In 1980 the New York State Supreme Court dismissed a libel suit LaRouche had filed against the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith for its characterization of a LaRouche group as anti-Semitic, noting that the assertion was "fair comment" based

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on the facts.) It is a moving target, however. True to Hofstadter's model, danger is ever-nigh if only the signals are perceived. The *New York Times* reported, in a two-part series on the LaRouche network in 1979:

> . . . life moves from crisis to crisis as Mr. LaRouche announces new plots of assassination or looming thermonuclear war. "Every few weeks there's a new reality, different from the one before but just as absolute," said one former member.

The Democratic Party has taken the brunt of the LaRouchite assault. (In 1982, shortly after I had been renominated by the New York State Democratic Convention, LaRouchites representing themselves as Democrats filed enough signatures to force a primary contest against one of their number. This was fought out all summer, sometimes literally, on the streets of New York. It was the nastiest campaign I have been involved with in more than thirty years of electoral politics.) In the main I think they are a spent force. But if this is so it is because there have been those in the Democratic Party and the labor movement willing to resist them.

Our allies have been in the media; first the press, then television. Mark this: No charge of conspiratorial subversion by Accuracy In Media would exceed the routine charges levelled by LaRouche and his followers against the networks. Television did not exactly rush to cover the story; an incident was needed, which came in the form of a fracas involving Dr. and Mrs. Henry A. Kissinger at Newark airport on February 7, 1982. But thereafter the movement was reported, as it should have been, and NBC did a full-scale documentary.[4]

Will an effort be made by conservatives to address the paranoid style on the Right? So far there have been few voices heard from the political ranks. Frankly, I smell fear. Does it not then fall to the conservative intellectuals, not least the new conservatives, to address the issue? True, they risk seeming "troublesome," as Kristol noted back in issue Number 2. But it ought to be recalled that they turned in conservative directions in no small measure out of disgust with the debasement of the standards of political discourse on the Left at about the time this journal first appeared.

Granted a problem exists with "elites." McCarthy had his success

[4] In this documentary, I was interviewed about the 1982 campaign. LaRouchites attempted to prevent the interview from taking place by various shenanigans. LaRouche sued NBC for libel, asking $150 million in damages. NBC filed a countersuit claiming that LaRouche had tried to prevent NBC's interview with me. A federal jury in Virginia found LaRouche had not been libeled, and in the countersuit awarded NBC $3 million in damages. (The judge in the case reduced it to $200,000.)

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not least because elements within our then much more readily identified foreign-policy elites and their constituents were getting a bit too comfortable with the fact of Communism abroad in the world. The American electorate was not in the least bit so disposed. Today there are similar divisions over moral perceptions. (Note, however, that Communism presented itself to the public generally, or at least to the people I grew up with, as a moral, not a political or economic issue. Its complete name was "*Godless* Communism.") The New York-based media (it is always the "*New York* media") will almost always incline to the more "cosmopolitan" view. They are more cosmopolitan. It will commonly be the case that their views will diverge from those of the public generally. This is something for television to be sensitive to: but not something it can help.

A final plea then. Something precious and irreplaceable is at stake: the freedom of the press in the form of television journalism. Issues come and go. It is institutions that must be preserved. It is the singular American good fortune that our radio and television are not state-owned, as they are almost everywhere, with allowance here and there for some privately owned competition. The curious aspect of an openly state-controlled media is that, in a democratic society, they can usually be held to impartial standards. (But then the British government recently cancelled a BBC documentary on Northern Ireland.) The risk we take with privately owned media is that they will submit to various forms of political control which, being so less visible and formal, are capable of imposing considerably greater bias. It is the turn of conservatives, in what is in so many ways a triumphantly conservative polity, to protect the institutions they inherited pretty much intact from the despised or disparaged liberals. It would do no harm for the networks to show a little impatience; a certain willingness to brawl a bit if it comes to that. What did Elmer Davis say way back then, when some not dissimilar issues were abroad? "The republic was not established by cowards, and cowards will not preserve it."

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The conservative renaissance in perspective

ROBERT NISBET

CONSERVATIVES might have been forgiven on election night, 1980, had visions of the millennium welled up in their minds. Ronald Reagan, 18-karat conservative of more than thirty years, former two-term governor, eloquent champion of Goldwater in 1964, runner-up for the nomination in 1976, the first real hero of the political Right since Goldwater, was very probably the first president in U.S. history who had not only made no bones about being a conservative first and last, but proudly trumpeted it, even over his Republican identity.

But there was more. This election in 1980 was no caprice of history, no passing miracle. It was, and was duly regarded as, the outcome of some three decades of gradual but continuous development of a bona fide conservatism in the U.S., one that was political at the core but was formed of an impressive number of other elements to give it body. Reagan's election was the capstone of a structure built over the years that included prominent intellectuals, academics, authors, new journals, institutes and centers, foundations and endowments, all well-identified with the conservative ideology in the public mind. Such had been the successes of the conservative cause that the very words "conservative" and "conservatism" had become an accepted part of the political dialogue.

This essay is a revised version of a chapter in Robert Nisbet's forthcoming book, Conservatism: Dream and Reality.

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This was an accomplishment indeed. Neither word had ever been particularly popular in American political affairs. "Reactionary" was a common epithet and an attribute enjoyed by no one, not even the hardiest of reactionaries. To be called a conservative—rarely did one admit to *being* one in America—was no more of a boost in politics than in any other walk of life, including business. Not having, as did Britain, a Conservative Party, there was nothing institutional to attract and fix individual impulses. Prior to the New Deal, neither party, Democratic nor Republican, had any clear mandate to either liberalism or conservatism. It was an American boast that the genius of American politics prevented extreme polarization of ideology in the major parties. The number of clamant radicals was small and so was the number of self-proclaimed conservatives and traditionalists. These existed to be sure, and in substantial numbers, but it was far more common to ring changes on "liberal" and "progressive" in American politics. Even "radical" had an acceptability that was denied "conservative." That consummate reactionary-nostalgic, Henry Ford, delighted in the (accurate) label of "progressive" for his assembly-line and wage-and-price contributions. He had been a pacifist in World War I.

Premature obituaries

Yet there was no real dearth of conservatives in America. I use the word in the sense it has had for about two centuries in Western thought: belief in a strong but unobtrusive government; an implicit decentralization of administration that directly followed a historically developed autonomy of all the major institutions—family, local community, church, school, business enterprise, and so on; an instinctive preference for the same institutions as the principal shelters of individuals in time of crisis or need—these rather than offices of the central government; a strong conviction in the superiority of common sense and experience in governmental matters over the kind of rationalist intelligence favored by professors and bureaucrats; and finally, almost uppermost, a skepticism of all social reform and a positive hatred of redistributionist schemes involving taxation, tariff, or currency manipulation, or, for that matter, anything in the way of mandated equality.

This was the conservatism of Edmund Burke's highly explicit *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity* and of John Adams's *Defence of Constitutions*. And it was the conservatism of a great many later Americans, of Lincoln, Cleveland, McKinley, Taft, Coolidge, and later of Robert Taft, Barry Goldwater, and, for close to thirty years

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leading up to 1980, of Ronald Reagan. Even in time of depression the conservative faith remained suprisingly strong. In 1936, at the pit of the Great Depression, and in spite of Roosevelt's engaging air of leadership, some 17 million Americans voted for Landon who not only spoke the conservative verities but seemed to embody them.

But the conservatism I describe had one major flaw: It was unable generally to cope with the challenges of liberalism and progressivism and their messages of social reform and individual liberation from many of life's burdens. After 1932 conservatism began to look like another of America's lost causes, companion in history's dustbin to the Old South, Populist Agrarianism, and the Protestant Ethic. After Goldwater's humiliating defeat in 1964 and the myth of the silent majority of true conservatives was revealed for what it was, many conservatives concluded that it was about time to join the Whigs and Federalists of yore.

Add to the problem faced by conservatism in politics the lack of a philosophical and cultural conservatism in America in the twentieth century. There had been a vein of this conservatism prior to the Civil War—in Hawthorne, Melville, Brownson, Cooper, and a few others—but it tended to mere eccentricity or capriciousness afterward: manifest in Henry and Brooks Adams, Ralph Adams Cram, and a few others, but little else. Irving Babbitt and Paul Elmer More, despite their great learning and trenchant critical judgment, were not known to many Americans apart from their students, one of whom, T.S. Eliot, escaped to authority and tradition in England. Santayana did somewhat better in carving out a niche, but he too was grateful in the end for European culture. We had nothing to compare with Europe's relative abundance in this respect; no phalanx of Saintsbury, Dawson, Eliot, Joyce, Mauriac, Martin du Gard, Mann, and others to combine in their public images a durable political conservatism and a bold and experimental literary career. Our critics were seemingly unprepared when a Robert Frost, a Faulkner, even a Cozzens made his very occasional appearance; years were required for understanding and some degree of acceptance by the literary community.

H. L. Mencken is an interesting case. For all his adult life he was an indomitable political conservative in all pertinent respects; nor did he ever seek to conceal his contempt for socialism, liberalism, reform, populism, and any and all forms of equality. Prior to about 1930, Mencken succeeded famously as a social as well as literary critic. This was the result in part of a lower intensity of political vendetta among intellectuals in those years and doubtless in larger

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part of his earned image as raider of the Bible Belt, the Booboisie, and Boston. But once the Great Depression hit and politics became the all-in-all in literature, art, and culture, Mencken was visible for the first time as the conservative he was: anti-Wilson, anti-Roosevelt, and contemptuous of all reforms aimed at any kind of redistribution of wealth. His punishment was a near-coventry, and there were many who thought him dead when he reemerged in the 1950s as a captivating memoirist. But his days as renowned critic of American life ended for good about the time of the Crash of 1929. His fabled wit on political subjects was found irrelevant or offensive by liberals and of insufficient substance by the publishers and editors of the many conservative newspapers still left in the 1930s.

It was a rare conservative indeed who flourished as a writer, artist, or scholar in this country from the Depression down through the 1950s. New Deal liberalism, socialism in both its home-grown and its Marxist, Soviet-inspired forms, and then the intoxication of wartime crusade abroad followed immediately by perhaps the greatest and most encompassing period of economic prosperity ever known by the American people, all effectively conspired to reduce the conservative idols to ignominy. Liberalism reigned supreme, virtually unchallenged as national philosophy through the 1950s. Newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*, all of which had successfully maintained their long-held conservatism of policy through the Depression, now began to liberalize, reaching by the 1960s a position on reform in government and permissiveness in society that would have horrified the newspapers' founders.

But liberalism was everywhere, in all spheres and walks, and at all levels, of American life throughout the 1950s. This was the decade in which the middle class began, ever so slowly at first, to participate in the welfare state and thus in the end to be its greatest backer. What Lionel Trilling called "the liberal imagination" was triumphant in the universities, and never so much as when Adlai Stevenson added his high-church, bell-like tones to the liberal liturgy. Heaven help the Taft or even Eisenhower supporter in the halls of ivy in those years.

Renewal and restoration

All this was in Trilling's mind when in 1950 he emphasized the paucity of conservatives in intellectual life. Often overlooked are the words immediately following: "This does not mean of course that there is no impulse to conservatism or reaction." Trilling was

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indeed perceptive. Impulse began to evolve immediately. It is not too much to describe the product of this evolution as a kind of renaissance in conservatism's history. Even as Trilling was writing, there were harbingers of the renaissance already on the scene. Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* was published in this country in 1944, its message at first lost in the war clouds of the time; but it had a surprising readership before the 1940s had ended. In 1948 Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* appeared; it is justly referred to as the morning star of the conservative renascence. A year later Peter Viereck's *Conservatism Revisited* came on the scene.

Between 1950 and 1953 an impressive number of distinctly conservative works appeared, sometimes to a considerable amount of attention in the book review columns. Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* was providential for the New Conservatives; it supplied lustrous lineage for Anglo-American conservatism since Burke. Particularly valuable was Kirk's stress on the American tradition, for it was almost as common then to deny this country a bona fide conservative vein as a feudal tradition. About the same time were published Eric Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics* and William F. Buckley's *God and Man at Yale*. All three of these books achieved national, if not always favorable attention, including *Time* stories for Kirk and Voegelin. Also published in this period, 1950-1953, were Leo Strauss's *Natural Right and History*, Eliseo Vivas's *The Moral Life and the Ethical Life*, Francis Graham Wilson's *The Case for Conservatism*, John Hallowell's *The Moral Foundations of Democracy*, Daniel Boorstin's *The Genius of American Politics*, and Gertrude Himmelfarb's *Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics*. My *Quest for Community* came out in 1953. I had not particularly written it as a conservative book, but when it was so judged, I did not appeal.

Such a collection in so brief a period was a good start indeed on conservatism's renaissance. Before the decade of the 1950s was out, a substantial number of other writers added to the conservative harvest, writers at once politically conservative and notable contributors to the arts and letters in America. Among them are Cleanth Brooks, Hugh Kenner, James Burnham, and Wilhelm Roepke. Reaching America in this period were some impressive works by such European conservatives as T.S. Eliot, Jacques Ellul, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Ernst Juenger, J. L. Talmon, and Hannah Arendt. In the 1950s a conservative economics of highest luster was achieved in this country by von Mises and Hayek from abroad and in America by Milton Friedman, Gottfried Haberler, and William Fellner; and there were others.

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By the end of the 1950s a conservative culture and network were visible in this country, still small but growing. There were a few journals, the most important of which was *National Review* founded earlier in the decade by Buckley. Conservative clubs, primarily intellectual, sprang up in the suburbs across the country and also, more important, on college campuses. Visiting lecturers of conservative credentials became more common even on large university campuses, sponsored for the most part by student groups. Conservative institutes and foundations began to show themselves. The American Enterprise Institute and the Hoover Institution had been founded earlier but this was the decade in which they began to show life and start the growth that would make them models for other conservative institutes in the 1960s and 1970s.

Henry Regnery proved that a conservative could specialize in publishing conservative books and be commercially successful at it. At symposiums and conferences participation in panels by conservatives along with liberals and socialists became increasingly standard practice.

Two philosophical resurrections took place in America in the 1950s, to help considerably the struggle for recognition. I refer to the restorations to fame and influence of Alexis de Tocqueville and Edmund Burke. Both had once, back in the nineteenth century, been favorites of literate Americans, but by the turn of the century both had begun to slip badly. In seven years of a generally good undergraduate and graduate education at Berkeley in the 1930s I never once heard Tocqueville's name mentioned in a class and only rarely, and quite incidentally, Burke's.

Tocqueville's rebirth began in the late 1930s. George Pierson's remarkable *Tocqueville and Beaumont in America* was published in 1938, to win high scholarly praise and also an award. J. P. Mayer's little book on Tocqueville, *Prophet of the Mass Age*, appeared the following year. There were also several perceptive articles by Albert Salomon of the New School, a European in American residence. In 1945 Alfred A. Knopf brought out a handsome new edition of *Democracy in America*, the first printing of any kind in half a century. It was edited and given superb introduction by Phillips Bradley of Queens College. By the early 1950s this book—by then in paperback—was something of a best-seller on campuses across the country. "As Tocqueville said" began to compete with "as Marx said" in classrooms and faculty clubs. Predictably, the Left "found" a radical vein of gold in Tocqueville's rolling hills of periphrasis, ambiguity, and outright contradiction in the two separated parts of

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his *Democracy in America*. But among serious and knowledgeable minds there was never the slightest question of Toqueville's provenance. Whatever fancies may be aroused by a first reading of that classic are quickly put to rest when one has seen, in the *Recollections*, what an aggressive conservative, even reactionary, Tocqueville was in 1848 in Paris.

Burke's resurrection in the 1950s was almost equally spectacular. He too had lain in desuetude—apart from a few quotations on the American colonists in school anthologies—for close to a century. He had clearly impressed some distinguished early Americans with his treatment of the French Revolution—John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and John Randolph to begin with. Lincoln read his speeches over and over. Even Woodrow Wilson professed to have been shaped by Burke. But prior to the late 1940s one heard little of him thereafter. Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* thoroughly established Burke in 1953 as the great influence he was on American as well as British philosophical conservatism. But the Left was dauntless. Thus the indefatigable Murray Rothbard professed to find his libertarian roots in Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society*; several radical ecologists did the same. Never mind. It was all publicity for the Marx of conservatism.

All in all, then, the 1950s was a very good decade for conservatism in American thought. Already beginning to form during this conservative renaissance was a very real reformation in American religion, chiefly evangelical religion. To the consternation of many faculty members, students at even the best colleges and universities were demanding religious speakers in the 1950s, among them Bishop Pike, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr. These, and most of those appearing on campuses, were generally main-line religionaries. In the Southwest, and in the long run of far greater importance, nothing less than a full-blown religious awakening was just beginning in the 1950s. Prominent among the leaders were those of a species Burke had called "political theologians" and "theological politicians." From these beginnings and acquiring great momentum in the 1960s would come eventually Moral Majority, not precisely conservative in either the British or American sense in politics, but prepared to join conservatives in any useful coalition.

"Neo" vs. "new"

Neoconservatism was born in the mid-1960s. It is almost inseparable from the "Student Revolution" which played something of the role in the conservative renaissance that the French Revolution had

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played in the rise of the philosophy at the end of the eighteenth century. In both instances, revolution was the precipitating force in what proved to be a significant development in political thought. Neoconservatism was christened by the socialist Michael Harrington, who wanted none of it for himself. The word caught on with surprising dispatch in the media, and it wasn't very long before "neoconservative" and "conservative" were becoming almost interchangeable, at least with respect to political and economic matters.

A degree of delicacy is required in dealing with the neoconservatives. Most of those who were most prominently mentioned as neoconservatives refused the label, preferring their established identities as socialists, social democrats, whatever. This is the case with Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Nathan Glazer, Seymour M. Lipset, Daniel Bell, Samuel Huntington, and James Q. Wilson, among others. I will not challenge, but looking back on their writings in *The Public Interest*, *Commentary*, and *Encounter* from about 1965 on, it is as though an invisible hand operated to bring diverse individuals into a consensus sufficient to warrant at least some part of the conservative label. For of a sudden some new and different perspectives were before the public, and with them a rhetoric one did not expect from American social scientists; one in which *authority*, *tradition*, *civil order*, and *social contract* played prominent roles.

It would be difficult to overstress the importance of the New Left and the Student Revolution—both of them in close relationship of course to such other issues as civil rights, the draft, and Vietnam—in American life generally in the 1960s and specifically in their stimulation of conservative response in the country. Irving Kristol defined a neoconservative as a liberal who had been mugged by reality; add only the campus as location, and a reasonably good start has been made in understanding the rise and significance of neoconservatism from the late 1960s on. What happened at Berkeley, San Francisco, Cornell, Michigan, Wisconsin, Harvard, Columbia, and other colleges and universities in this country from about 1965 to 1972 was a new experience in the country at large and most poignantly to university administrations and faculties. Interestingly, the New Left seemed to aim with special fervor at prominent liberals and also old-line socialists, in its demolition of reputations, curricula, and academic freedom.

Irving Kristol from the start was the recognized *eminence* of the neoconservatives, and also one of the very few to accept if not actually relish the new label. Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary* since 1960, turned that influential journal into a voice of neoconser-

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vatism by the time the student revolution was hitting its stride. In London there was *Encounter*, edited by Melvin Lasky, to publish neoconservative voices. Kristol had founded—with Stephen Spender—*Encounter* in the mid-1950s and in 1965 he, with Daniel Bell as co-editor, began *The Public Interest*, from the start a visible neoconservative force in the social and the policy sciences. Kristol had never been a liberal, really; from youthful Trotskyism he went almost directly to an eclectic philosophy that had more of the conservative's skepticism about modernity than the liberal's acceptance of it. In several essays written before he founded *Encounter*, most notably one on the origins of McCarthyism in America, he stirred up liberal sensibilities as they had not often been stirred up before. In the early 1970s the Left duly appointed Kristol Godfather of the neoconservatives.

There were and are likenesses and differences—and little fraternization—between the new conservatism and neoconservatism. Among likenesses are a sophisticated awareness of the role of Soviet Communism in the world and of the need—long emphasized by James Burnham in *National Review*—for an adequate American foreign policy and military armament. There was common dislike of the Left and its assorted doctrines ranging from pacifism abroad to militance at home; a repudiation of the kind of liberalism that had grown up in the postwar period—the liberalism of Stevenson, the Kennedys, McGovern, and their many followers; an opposition to the increasingly centralized and collectivized bureaucracy that seemed to be liberalism's largest contribution. There was a common regard, albeit in differing intensities, for the private sector, the free market, and the mechanisms of growth and equilibrium which had not yet been seriously caught up in the regulatory network of the federal government. *The Public Interest* became in short order a very center of the policy thinking in this country that dealt with the relationships between the private and public sectors—with a historically rare interest in such matters as localism, regionalism, decentralization, mediating structures, and so on.

The differences between the two branches of conservatism fell generally into two distinct areas. There was a considerably greater interest in, and affinity with, religious and moral affairs by the new conservatives. Conversely there was a greater acceptance of the ethic of the welfare state in neoconservatism. Finally, there was a stronger air of the academy among the neoconservatives, most of whom were recognized social scientists in the universities. These differences largely remain, but, as I noted above, they are not and

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have not been sufficient to prevent the two labels from becoming almost interchangeable. One final difference should be stressed: It is a fair assumption that all new conservatives voted for Reagan in 1980 and again in 1984. No such assumption can be validly held, though, about neoconservatives. Probably only a small fraction of those who had been most prominent in *The Public Interest* and in *Commentary* voted for Reagan.

Strange bedfellows

Reagan's election in 1980 was indubitably a conservative victory and could quite reasonably be seen as the glorious culmination of an ideological evolution that had begun three decades earlier. But the Reagan victory was a good deal more than an episode in American conservatism. It was a coalition triumph, analogous in its sweep and diversity to FDR's in the 1930s. Not often was "liberal" put as label on Roosevelt's coalition; not with the Deep South a vital part of it and also the big Northern political machines, the Roman Catholic establishment, and the great landowners of the Southwest. But from the beginning, Reagan's equally polyglot coalition was given, with rare qualification, the generic characterization of "conservative." There were indeed traditional conservatives of the old line present; there were moderates and neoconservatives in at least some measure. But there were also some powerful, politically indispensable groups whose relationship with American conservatives in the past had been tenuous and fitful at best.

Thus it seems strange for the conservative label to have been so widely given during the last few years to the partisans of a more aggressive and interventionist foreign policy and of a huge defense budget. In the history of the twentieth century there has been a notable gulf between most conservatives and our successive ventures in war. Even before this century began, McKinley, a Republican conservative, had to be goaded into the Spanish war, and by such a populist-radical Democrat as William Randolph Hearst.

We were led into World War I by Wilson, into its great successor by FDR, into Korea by Truman, and Vietnam by Kennedy, all of them progressive liberals in ideology. More to the point perhaps, conservatives and isolationists in the periods leading up to the two world wars were close to being one and the same species. Theodore Roosevelt was a hawk, but hardly a conservative in domestic policy. Coolidge and Hoover, also Eisenhower, were the opposite of hawks. Thus Reagan could only move Coolidge's portrait to greater visibil-

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ity in the White House and turn to Roosevelt and Kennedy as his role-models in foreign policy.

Equally strange, almost hilarious indeed, is the banner of conservatism seen hanging over the evangelicals. Crusades of evangelicals for moral and political objectives have never had significant appeal to conservatives. The Tory repugnance for the Wesleyans in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been echoed generally in this country. The evangelicals' and fundamentalists' crusades for abolition of Sunday baseball, abortion, tobacco, liquor, and birth control ran afoul of most American conservatives' not irrational conviction that such enthusiasm was unseemly in the public square and definitely threatening to business. Populists are of course another matter; they and the evangelicals have from the beginning had recurrent ties.

Conservatism in any recognizable manifestation aims at "getting government off our backs," to use the phrasing of one recent American conservative. But the primary, sweeping thrust of Moral Majority has come to be that of, quite bluntly, getting more government *on* our backs, through proposed laws and constitutional amendments to cover abortion, Baby Doe cases, school prayers, and, whoever knows in these matters, also contraception, pre-marital sex, liquor again?

No more logical or historical is confusion of the populists with conservatives. The essence of populism is a view of democracy that is diametrically opposed to that of conservatives—who have always favored checks upon easily formed majorities. But the history of populism in America is one of continued struggle *against* the mechanisms of indirection and struggle *for* such instrumentalities of direct democracy as the initiative, the referendum and the recall, the direct election of U.S. senators, and the like. Needless to say, public bodies like the Supreme Court and the Federal Reserve Bank arouse maximum ire in populist hearts. Populism's founding father is Rousseau, certainly not Burke. William Jennings Bryan and his crusade for Free Silver threw more panic into the conservatives of that day than anything ever mounted by socialists and Communists. Today's populists like Reagan because there is, and has been from the beginning, a considerable streak of populism in him and because he has a feeling for the *people* as a great, potentially electric, presence with whom and through whom great things can be done. More of Reagan goes back to another "damned cowboy," Theodore Roosevelt, than to William Howard Taft, Calvin Coolidge, or Robert Taft.

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There is no need to add details of other such anomalies: the libertarians demanding laissez-faire almost everywhere in society side by side with autarkists passionate for protection and "national industrial strategy," supply-siders, monetarists, and the far Right, ever-notable for seeking capture of the government rather than autonomy from it. All coalitions have strange bedfellows. From a cognitive point of view there is no reason why Reagan or anyone else should not be able to embrace personally almost all of the component persuasions of his coalition. After all, the test of a civilized mind, it has been said, is its ability to carry two or more contrary ideas at once. And as for cognitive dissonance, who is altogether free of it?

But my interest here is and has been from the beginning political conservatism and its renaissance of three decades. Has it been significantly changed in content and probable future by its association with other elements of the Reagan coalition? Has its accumulation of riches—in the sheer number of uses of its sacred *nomen* by others—been an embarrassment of riches? If ideologies can feel, how does conservatism feel after four years of seeing its name taken in vain by supply-siders, pro-lifers, hawks, protectionists, and others in the coalition? Is the net feeling one of pride or dismay? We cannot help thinking of the mirrror on the wall and of the variety of answers possible when it was asked during these recent years: Who is the fairest "conservative" of them all?

We must not forget either the dark side of ideological triumph, that is, the emotions which wash over ideologists who are "dizzy with success." The "narcissism of small differences" begins to operate. One of the most riveting of spectacles in the French Revolution was that provided at its height by the Jacobins and their sudden mesmerization by not only small differences among them but by the dread possibility of "insincerity," "inauthenticity," and "hypocrisy." Of a sudden the guillotine stopped chopping off the heads of bloated aristocrats and went to work on some of the Robespierres of the movement. There are no guillotines in sight on the Mall but no Jacobin ever hissed "hypocrite" more malevolently than so-called "hard-liners" have at suspected "pragmatists" these last few years. Some of the spirit of boundless passion we saw last summer at Dallas in the Southern Baptist Conference in debates on "conservatism" and "liberalism" in theology has occasionally crept into Reagan coalition conferences since the victory in 1980. Burke feared the "political theologians" and "theological politicians" he identified almost as much as the hard-core Jacobins.

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The conservative totem: uses and abuses

But conservatism is a hardy stock after nearly two centuries of mostly defeats by liberals, socialists, and other beneficiaries of modernity—or in the socialists' case sometime beneficiaries. It is not likely to have had its head turned at San Francisco in the summer of 1984 when Governor Mario Cuomo of New York borrowed egregiously from conservative symbolism—the family alone cited two dozen times—merely to clothe the naked welfare state. No one needs or even pays much attention to that kind of tribute. No more likely, I think, are the tributes by Moral Majoritarians and populists and advocates of strong foreign policy in Reagan's Washington to have changed much the character of political conservatism—though possibly its willingness to enter into future liaisons.

Conservatism's greatest strength is its possession by historic right of such values as localism, decentralization, family, neighborhood, mutual aid, and belief in growth of business on the one hand and of religion on the other. In an age of welfare states and their huge bureaucracies, not to forget their benefits to the middle class as well as to the indigent, it is unlikely that such values are going to win elections; not by themselves at any rate. Still it says something that such values are still lustrous enough in this advanced stage of welfarism in the West that both enemies and strangers seek to appropriate the conservative totem from time to time. There are intelligent neoconservatives who argue that conservatism's cause can be advanced measurably by prefacing its name with "welfare." But most traditional conservatives, I am sure, would think an oxymoron had been created, one akin to "laissez-faire socialist."

A brilliant French critic, Emile Faguet, called the first generation of conservatives in Europe "prophets of the past." That is very good. They speak by design from the past and often about the past. Churchill said he loved the past, was uneasy about the present, and feared the future. Clement Attlee once said Churchill's mind was like a layer cake with each layer a different century, including one "which may possibly have been the twenty-first." But for all that, Churchill was considerably ahead of his partners, including FDR, in his grasp of the present and its imperatives.

Prophets the conservatives may be, but they have also been, and will doubtless continue to be, guerrillas of the past. Their sorties in politics, economics, education, and a great deal of the whole cultural area have been among the high water levels of history the last 200 years in both America and Britain, and indeed other parts of the West. I suspect that traditional conservatives will remain prophets

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and guerrillas of the past. Ideology can become habit-forming. Look at the socialists in our time. It is entirely possible that conservatives and socialists will become better acquainted all the time in the years ahead. Socialists too speak from the sacred past, the past that Marx's present has now become. Socialists have little if any more affection for the liberal welfare state than do traditional conservatives. They too are guerrillas as well as prophets of their distinctive past. Between the two forces there could be some exciting raids on the present in the foreseeable future.

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